

- So Christ went into the desert to fast for 40 days and nights.
- What’s the significance of that number 40?
- First of all, in the story of Noah, it rained forty days and nights—that rain which God sent to cleanse the world of the evil that was upon it.
- But also...Moses fasted for days and nights on the desert Mt. Sinai before receiving the 10 commandments from God...and Elijah fasted 40 days in the desert on his journey to Mt. Horeb (which is the same Mt. Sinai) to receive a mission from God...when he heard God not in the earthquake or the fire, but in the tiny whispering sound (1 Kings 19).
- Who did Jesus meet at the Transfiguration? Moses and Elijah—the lawgiver and the great prophet...indicating that all revelation comes together in Christ.
- And King David—the beloved of God, and the adoptive ancestor of Jesus—reigned over Israel for 40 years. What do people cry out when they meet Jesus? “Son of David!”
- But most of all, “forty” is the number of years that the Israelites spent in the desert on their journey to the Promised Land...and as the Israelites were tempted against God in the desert, Satan would tempt Jesus as well.
- And so...in going to the desert, Jesus inaugurates a new Exodus... to prepare for His mission to lead the world to the true and eternal Promised Land.
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- Now, the three temptations: temptations common to all of us—the temptation to physical pleasure and satiety (“turn these stones into bread”), the temptation to power (“I will give you all this authority

and glory”), and presumption before God (“throw yourself down [and test God’s providence]”).

- St. John restates these temptations his first letter when he writes: *“For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world.”* (1Jo 2:16 RSV)...the same temptations from the very beginning, as we hear in Genesis: *“So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise [to be “like God”, Satan had promised her], she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate.”* (Gen 3:6 RSV)
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- In the face of temptation, Adam & Eve failed, and the Israelites in the desert failed. But Jesus endures, and is victorious over “the adversary”—which is what the name “Satan” means.
- And what is the weapon of victory? The revelation of...and trust in...God.
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- The Gospel says that Jesus “was hungry”, emphasizing Jesus’ true human nature, and thus that He can truly be tempted as we all are.
- In fact, the letter to the Hebrews, speaking about Him, specifically notes *“...we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.”* (Heb 4:15 RSV)
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- Now note that, in the accounts of the temptations of Christ in the desert, even Satan Himself can quote scripture...showing that even God’s Word can be used wrongly. As St. Paul warns us: *“...even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.”* (2 Cor 11:14 RSV)

- One of the errors commonly fallen into is “cherry-picking” verses to fit a preconceived idea. This happens a lot with various sects that may come to your door.
 - Not that they have bad intentions. But trust in the guidance of our holy Catholic Church, which has made the Word of God its study for 2000 years.
 - Scripture must be viewed in its totality, as Jesus shows us in the Gospel today in countering Satan.
 - For instance, Paul writes in Romans that we are saved by faith... but he also warns in his letters of the dangers of sin to our salvation and of the necessity of good works. Jesus certainly does; just read Matthew 25: “*Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink...*”, etc. (Mat 25:41-42 RSV)
 - And as St. James emphasizes: “*Faith without works is dead*” ...sterile ...lifeless.
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- So...what are our defenses against these temptations? They are those familiar works which the Church emphasizes during Lent: Against the temptation of pleasure-seeking: the discipline of fasting. Against the temptation to wealth and power: almsgiving and charity. Against the temptation of tempting God or idolatry: Prayer.
 - The world is replete with idols—sexuality, money, power, glory, etc., and yet God has given us the defense we need against them...
 - ...and as Paul wrote: “*...God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control.*” (2 Tim 1:7)
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- One of the things I love about the accounts of the temptations of Christ is Jesus’ absolute affirmation and dependence on the

scriptures: “This is what God said; therefore, that is what I will do”...teaching us of the sure refuge that is the Word of God.

- If nothing else, take that away from our Gospel reading today... because, like with Jesus, Satan is always waiting for an opportune time to tempt us...
- ...and, strengthened by His Word and revelation we can prevail... and then God will proclaim about us to the saints and angels the words of the responsorial psalm today:
 - *Because he clings to me, I will deliver him;*
I will set him on high because he acknowledges my name.
He shall call upon me, and I will answer him;
I will be with him in distress;
I will deliver him and glorify him.
- How glorify us? Jesus tells us in one of His last prayers to the Father before His Passion: “*I wish that where I am they also may be...*”

Reading I

[Dt 26:4-10](#)

Moses spoke to the people, saying:

“The priest shall receive the basket from you
and shall set it in front of the altar of the LORD, your God.

Then you shall declare before the Lord, your God,
‘My father was a wandering Aramean
who went down to Egypt with a small household
and lived there as an alien.

But there he became a nation
great, strong, and numerous.

When the Egyptians maltreated and oppressed us,
imposing hard labor upon us,
we cried to the LORD, the God of our fathers,
and he heard our cry
and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression.

He brought us out of Egypt
with his strong hand and outstretched arm,
with terrifying power, with signs and wonders;
and bringing us into this country,
he gave us this land flowing with milk and honey.

Therefore, I have now brought you the firstfruits
of the products of the soil
which you, O LORD, have given me.’
And having set them before the Lord, your God,
you shall bow down in his presence.”

Responsorial Psalm

[Ps 91:1-2, 10-11, 12-13, 14-15.](#)

(cf. 15b) **Be with me, Lord, when I am in trouble.**

You who dwell in the shelter of the Most High,
who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,
say to the LORD, “My refuge and fortress,
my God in whom I trust.”

Be with me, Lord, when I am in trouble.

No evil shall befall you,
nor shall affliction come near your tent,
For to his angels he has given command about you,
that they guard you in all your ways.

Be with me, Lord, when I am in trouble.

Upon their hands they shall bear you up,
lest you dash your foot against a stone.
You shall tread upon the asp and the viper;
you shall trample down the lion and the dragon.

Be with me, Lord, when I am in trouble.

Because he clings to me, I will deliver him;
I will set him on high because he acknowledges my name.
He shall call upon me, and I will answer him;
I will be with him in distress;
I will deliver him and glorify him.

Be with me, Lord, when I am in trouble.

reading II

[Rom 10:8-13](#)

Brothers and sisters:

What does Scripture say?

*The word is near you,
in your mouth and in your heart*

—that is, the word of faith that we preach—,
for, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord
and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead,
you will be saved.

For one believes with the heart and so is justified,
and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved.

For the Scripture says,

No one who believes in him will be put to shame.

For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek;
the same Lord is Lord of all,
enriching all who call upon him.

For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Gospel

[Lk 4:1-13](#)

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan
and was led by the Spirit into the desert for forty days,
to be tempted by the devil.

He ate nothing during those days,
and when they were over he was hungry.

The devil said to him,

“If you are the Son of God,
command this stone to become bread.”

Jesus answered him,

“It is written, *One does not live on bread alone.*”

Then he took him up and showed him
all the kingdoms of the world in a single instant.

The devil said to him,

“I shall give to you all this power and glory;
for it has been handed over to me,
and I may give it to whomever I wish.

All this will be yours, if you worship me.”

Jesus said to him in reply,

“It is written:

*You shall worship the Lord, your God,
and him alone shall you serve.”*

Then he led him to Jerusalem,

made him stand on the parapet of the temple, and said to him,

“If you are the Son of God,

throw yourself down from here, for it is written:

*He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,
and:*

*With their hands they will support you,
lest you dash your foot against a stone.”*

Jesus said to him in reply,

“It also says,

You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.”

When the devil had finished every temptation, he departed from him for a time.