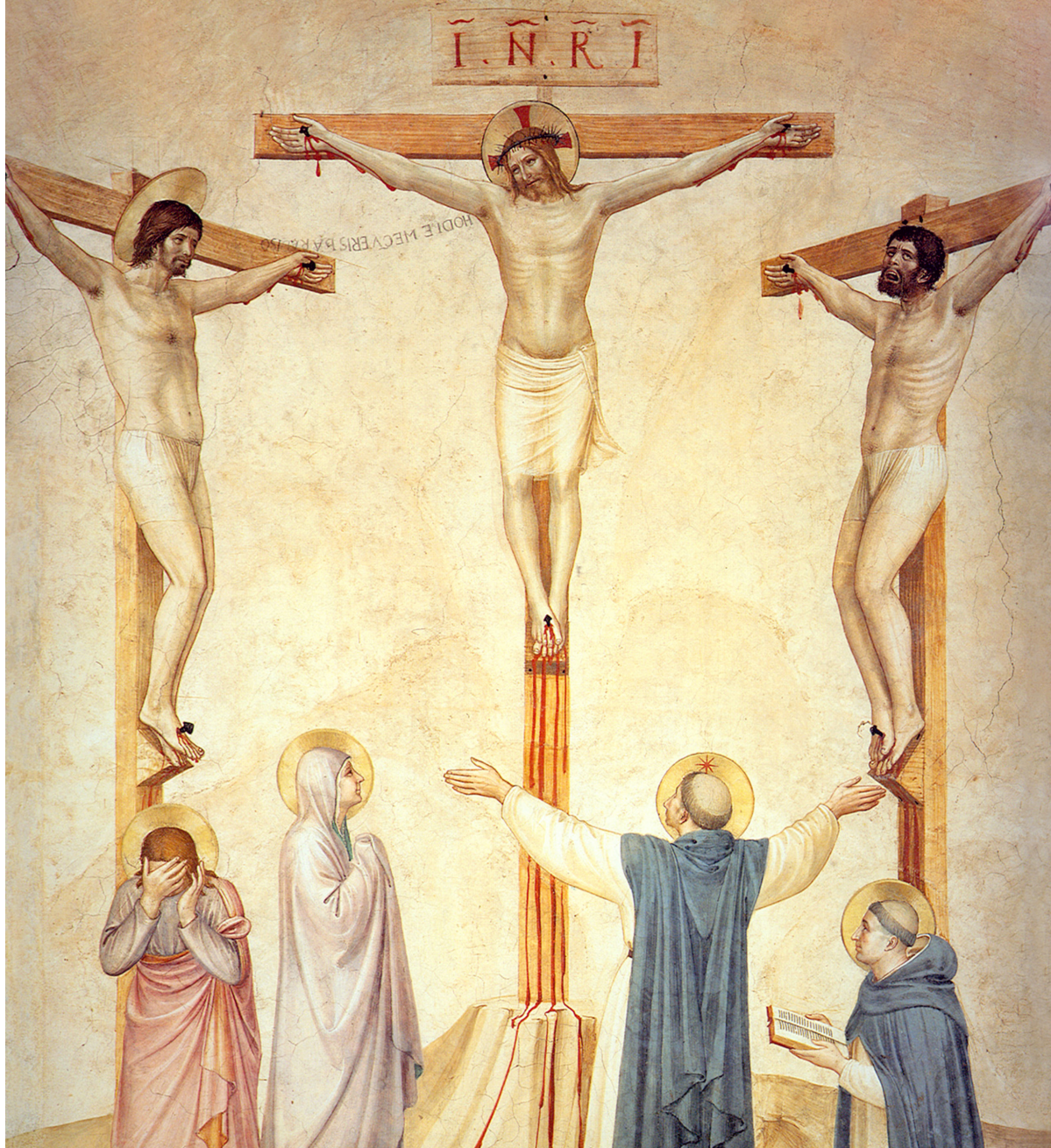


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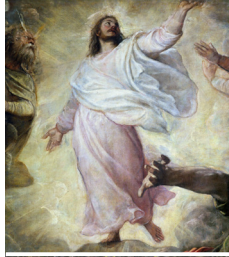




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THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT



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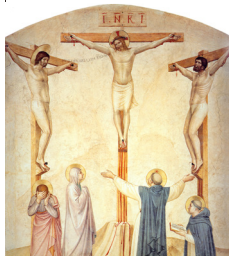
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Ash Wednesday

WEDNESDAY 2 MARCH 2022

JOEL 2:12–18

PSALM 50(51):3–6, 12–14, 17

2 CORINTHIANS 5:20–6:2

MATTHEW 6:1–6, 16–18

Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned. RESPONSORIAL PSALM RESPONSE

This is the cry and humble prayer of King David as he prostrates himself before the Lord in sorrow and repentance after having been confronted with his sin by the prophet Nathan. He did not deny his sin or try to make excuses, but with humility and a contrite heart, he pleaded for mercy before God, and his prayer was heard.

This is what Lent is all about—beginning today with Ash Wednesday. Without excuses or denial, we humbly recognise and acknowledge our sin before God and seek our merciful Father's forgiveness. This is essential to our lives as Christians, because all sin, whether serious or not, has the effect of distancing us from God. We need to repent of our sins so as to avoid being separated from God. Without regular Confession, sin can creep up on us in the most imperceptible of ways until something happens and we discover that we have strayed far from God, and even perhaps become strangers to him without realising it.

As today's Gospel reminds us, Lent calls us into the secret place of the heart where we are alone with God, allowing us to examine our conscience and life in order to shine a light on whatever may be keeping us from being completely united with God, and then—with his grace—embark on a course of spiritual and practical action that will lead us back to God: fasting, prayer, almsgiving, and a good Confession.

The sobering words of today's liturgy, "*Remember* you are dust, and to dust you shall return," reminds us of two things: that without God we are nothing, and we need to empty ourselves of sinfulness and pride so that we may be filled with the life and grace of God.

Having confessed his sin before God, King David continues with faith and hope: "A pure heart create for me, O God, put a steadfast spirit within me."

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

FR CHRISTOPHER G SARKIS

Thursday after Ash Wednesday

THURSDAY 3 MARCH 2022

DEUTERONOMY 30:15–20

PSALM 1:1–4, 6

LUKE 9:22–25

If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross every day and follow me. LK 9:22

After reading today's Gospel, I was reminded of the time my mother announced to the family that she had been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. The family was devastated. I was surprised at how calm my mother was. When I was able to have time with her alone, I asked her how she really was. She looked at me very peacefully and said, "I'm good really, this is my cross, we all have crosses in life, this is mine. This will give me more time to pray and be with Jesus." Down the track when she was quite ill and approaching Jesus in heaven, she would share how difficult it was to persevere in prayer. I would gently remind her that she is living her prayer, that she is with Jesus in his suffering on the cross.

Life can hold many disappointments, trials and challenges. Today's challenge or invitation will be different and unique for each one of us. The cross that I am to bear will be different to that of my sisters, and is different to the cross of my mother. Perhaps the sufferings we carry are physical ailments, an addiction, unhealthy attachments, or maybe the consequences of our sin.

Jesus invites us in the Gospel today to deny ourselves—to say no to temptations, desires, attachments, sin, wanting to give up, or falling into despair. Instead, he asks us to take up our crosses and follow him. Jesus who has suffered with us, and for us, will always remain close to us. In return for suffering, he offers us eternal life in his loving presence.

Lord Jesus, help me to deny myself for your sake. Give me the grace to carry the crosses in my life. When temptations, trials and disappointments get thrown my way, give me the strength and grace to lean into your loving care—trusting that one day I will be with you in paradise. Amen.

THERESE MILLS MGL



The Temptation

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT





Artwork Spotlight *for personal reflection*

with Mgr Graham Schmitzer

The Temptations of Christ (1480–1482)

Alessandro di Mariano di Vanni Filipepi (known as Sandro Botticelli (1445–1510);

Fresco, 345.5×555 cm. Sistine Chapel, Rome. Public Domain.

Practically the first word we hear during Lent is *remember*: “Remember you are dust, and unto dust you will return.” It is an invitation to face our mortality, and thus our true identity.

Many of the scriptural themes of Lent can be traced back to the early Church. They were carefully chosen as the final instruction for those entering the Church at Easter, and thereafter as a reminder each year for all Christians of the life they had chosen. We can so easily forget. It was the rationale for the past custom of the regular parish mission for which the Redemptorists became famous. The missionaries would help us remember the basics of our faith.

“Remember you are dust, and unto dust you will return.” It is an invitation to face our mortality, and thus our true identity.

Today’s Gospel reminds us that Christ identified himself with us by allowing himself to be tempted as we are. In fact, St Luke tells us that this was specifically inspired by the Holy Spirit. “[He] was led by the Spirit through the wilderness” (Lk 4:1). Scholars tell us that Luke has stylised what would have been a lifelong struggle for Jesus. Luke gives a hint by ending his account saying that the devil would return again—at Calvary, using the mockery of the Jewish leaders and the soldiers: “Save yourself” (and we will believe).

Sandro Botticelli, born probably in 1445 in Florence, was asked in 1481 by Pope Sixtus IV to come to Rome to paint some frescoes for his newly created papal chapel (since known as the Sistine Chapel). Botticelli was to paint three, among which is the one we are contemplating. (I have been to the Sistine Chapel several times and I am always amazed at the majority of visitors who go through gazing at Michelangelo’s

ceiling, taking no notice of the extraordinarily beautiful frescoes along the side walls. The walls depict parallel stories—Moses on one

side and Christ on the other, showing the continuity of the Old and New Testaments.)

Botticelli places Christ's three temptations in the upper section of the fresco. On the left, Jesus, who has been fasting, is tempted by the devil, in the guise of a hermit, to turn stones into bread. The devil holds a rosary and a pilgrim's staff in his left hand. But we can still recognise him by the wings of a bat and the feet of a vulture. The scene takes place in front of a forest of oak trees, the symbol of the Della Rovere family to which Pope Sixtus IV belonged.

Then, in the upper centre of the picture, the devil has carried Jesus to the top of the Temple at Jerusalem, symbolised here as the old St Peter's Basilica. The devil tempts Jesus to challenge God's promise that he will be protected by angels, by throwing himself down.

In the third temptation, on the upper right, the devil has taken Jesus to a high mountain where he shows him the beauties of the earth, and promises him their power if only he will adore him. When Jesus refuses, the devil drops his disguise and falls from the mountain. Angels come to Jesus' aid and prepare a table with wine and bread (a forecast of the Last Supper perhaps, since the Eucharist will give us the grace to resist temptation.)

In the centre left, Jesus explains to the three angels behind him the ritual that is taking place in the foreground. (The angel in green holds a Lily and is probably Gabriel.) A man whom Jesus has healed of leprosy presents himself to the high priest so that he may be pronounced clean. He holds a basin of water in which is a branch of hyssop. On the left, a woman carries on her head a basket containing two fowls for sacrifice; on the right another woman brings cedar wood. These three ingredients were part of the ritual of cleansing a leper.

Jesus' temptations were certainly real. The desert or wilderness was seen as a place of testing. There the people of Israel had faced God and themselves, and frequently failed the test. There Jesus, following his Baptism, faced his Father and faced

himself. What was his mission and how would he carry it out? The devil suggested he not be too hard on himself nor on his followers. Use his powers and entertain the people. But Jesus would not use his powers as a personal privilege, nor would he work miracles to impress people, nor would he compromise evil. And so, the meaning

of the event in the foreground of the painting. Why is Jesus pointing it out? To show that he has come not in power, but in mercy. The leper had asked: "If you want to, you can cleanse me." Jesus replied, "Of course I want to" (Lk 5:12–13).

Lent is for us the desert we must enter for 40 days—a time to face God in prayer, a time to face ourselves. It is always good to know one's strength and weaknesses, one's psychological needs, one's prejudices. The word of God,

says St Paul, is a two-edged sword (Heb 4:12). Close attention to the Scriptures this season will help us separate the chaff from the wheat. "Remember your dignity, O Christian," says St Leo the Great (*Sermo 1 in Nativitate Domini*).

MGR GRAHAM SCHMITZER

Lent is for us the desert we must enter for 40 days—a time to face God in prayer, a time to face ourselves. It is always good to know one's strength and weaknesses, one's psychological needs, one's prejudices.

DEUTERONOMY 26:4–10

PSALM 90(91):1–2, 10–15

ROMANS 10:8–13

LUKE 4:1–13

The Temptation

OPENING PRAYER

Host: Let us pause and call to mind
God's presence within and among us,
today and always.

Brief pause.

All: You who are over us,
you who are one of us,
you who are:
give us a pure heart that we may see you,
a humble heart that we may hear you;
a heart of love that we may serve you;
a heart of faith that we may
abide in you. Amen.

(Dag Hammarskjöld)

RESPONSORIAL PSALM



PSALM 90(91):1–2, 10–15

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

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High
and abides in the shade of the Almighty
says to the Lord: "My refuge,
my stronghold, my God in whom I trust!" **R.**

Upon you no evil shall fall,
no plague approach where you dwell.
For you has he commanded his angels,
to keep you in all your ways. **R.**

They shall bear you upon their hands
lest you strike your foot against a stone.
On the lion and the viper you will tread
and trample the young lion and the dragon. **R.**

His love he set on me, so I will rescue him;
protect him for he knows my name.
When he calls I shall answer: "I am with you,"
I will save him in distress and give him glory. **R.**

GOSPEL

LUKE 4:1–13



Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit through the wilderness, being tempted there by the devil for forty days. During that time, he ate nothing and at the end he was hungry. Then the devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to turn into a loaf." But Jesus replied, "Scripture says: Man does not live on bread alone."

Then leading him to a height, the devil showed him in a moment of time all the kingdoms of the world and said to him, "I will give you all this power and the glory of these kingdoms, for it has been committed to me and I give it to anyone I choose. Worship me, then, and it shall all be yours." But Jesus answered him, "Scripture says:

You must worship the Lord your
God, and serve him alone."

Then he led him to Jerusalem and made him stand on the parapet of the Temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said to him "throw yourself down from here, for scripture says:

He will put his angels in charge of
you to guard you, and again:

They will hold you up on their hands
in case you hurt your foot against a stone."
But Jesus answered him, "It has been said:
You must not put the Lord your God to the test."

Having exhausted all these ways of tempting him, the devil left him, to return at the appointed time.

The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ.

Pause for silent reflection.

Breaking Open the Word

with Fr Antony Jukes OFM



In the temptations in the desert, I think the devil is subtly tempting Jesus to use divine power to win people over to God. Why would the devil do this?

In the first temptation the devil says to Jesus: “If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to turn into a loaf.” The devil knows Jesus is hungry. The devil knows there are many hungry people in our world; hungry not just for food, but hungry with many other desires. The devil is suggesting to Jesus that he use his divine power to feed himself and others. If Jesus satisfies the hunger of people, in the sense of constantly giving them whatever they want, satisfying their desires, they will flock to him in huge numbers. But as tempting as it may be, this is not the way to win people over to God. If you bribe people to follow you, they will only follow for selfish reasons, and only when they have established what is in it for them. They will take, but will never give, and if things become difficult or if a better offer comes their way, they will leave. So, Jesus rejects this temptation. He does not want his followers to have the attitude, “What is in it for me; what can Church and society do for me?” Instead, he calls us to a life of service (Mt 20:25–28).

In the second temptation, Jesus is led to a height and is shown all the kingdoms of the world. Seeing all the problems, the conflicts, the evil in the hearts of people, it might seem impossible for Jesus to win people over to God by being loving, merciful and forgiving. And then the devil takes the opportunity. Bow down and “worship me” and “I will give you all this power and the glory of these kingdoms”, and then you can impose your own style of rule—forcing people to love and worship you. But, as tempting as it may be, if you impose your rule on others, they will resent you for it. You cannot impose God’s love on people, and you cannot force people to love God in return. If love is forced, it is not genuine. So, Jesus rejects this temptation. Jesus does not impose his rule upon us. He waits, “I stand at the door and knock”

(Rv 3:20) until we invite him into our life and into the kingdom of our heart, freely opening our heart to receive his love and to love him in return.

In the third temptation, Jesus is led to the parapet of the Temple, and the devil says to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here.” The devil is suggesting to Jesus that if he performs an amazing stunt—an impressive show of divine power—the people will flock to him in

huge numbers and will worship him like a celebrity or a superstar. But as tempting as it may be, if you do something really impressive one week, the people will expect something even more impressive the following week. If you fail to deliver, if you fail to live up to expectations, the people will get bored and will gradually drift away. So, Jesus rejects this temptation. He does not want our faith in him to be so dependent

on spectacular miracles, dramatic displays of power and frequent signs (cf. Mt 12:39). That sort of faith is shallow and weak, constantly in need of reassurance. Jesus wants us to have a faith that will stand firm through the good times, through difficult times and through ordinary moments in life.

FR ANTONY JUKES OFM

SEE PAGE 14 FOR REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Spiritual Direction

with Mother Hilda Scott OSB



Once again, we are here listening to the account from St Luke of the temptations in the wilderness. So often that is exactly where temptations happen—in the wilderness of our needs. Jesus had plenty of needs right there and then: basic needs for food and water; needs for perhaps understanding, courage, clarity, direction and who knows what? Haven’t we all been there at times in our lives?

The thing is that, when the devil put before Jesus a solution to his needs, Jesus was grounded enough to say, “No.” It seems to me that Jesus could say no because he had in fact already said “yes” to his Father. One can never find a *no* when what we have said *yes* to still holds its integrity within our hearts.

Let me tell you a story. Some years ago I had the good fortune to meet a very fine man, a businessman (let's call him Jack). He was much older than I, had raised a family, and was reasonably successful in life. He told me that when he was a younger man, he had gone on an overseas business trip with some colleagues. It was an understood fact that a normal occurrence during these trips, and one paid for by the company, was the use of an escort service. I don't need to amplify for you what that might mean. The other men on the trip eagerly took these opportunities as they came. Jack told me how tempted he was to take it up too, after all, one wants to be seen as part of the group and be accepted by them. But then he thought of his wife Debbie back home with his three boys in Australia and he couldn't do it. He thought long over his married life and the ways in which Debbie and he had built a life together. He remembered her self-giving nature, her understanding and tolerance of him, and he remembered the day they were married. He had said *yes* to her then, and they had continued to say *yes* to each other in 101 different ways ever

Jesus could say *no* because he had in fact already said “yes” to his Father. One can never find a *no* when what we have said *yes* to still holds its integrity within our hearts.

since. So, Jack said *no* to the temptation because he had already said *yes* to something bigger.

Maybe that is something we could all take on this Lent. Why not make this a time to go about saying *yes* to all the good things there are—to the commitments in our lives. Then we will find it very easy to say *no* to that which will inevitably derail

and destroy us. Jesus said *yes* to the Father, because the Father had already said *yes* to us—to you—and Jesus took it up. It ultimately meant crucifixion for him, but then again, *yes* to the call of love always does. A *yes* to having children, for instance, means a *yes* to countless nights of sleep deprivation no matter how old they get. And yet, who of you would change that? Ask yourselves as you look back over your life:

when have you said *yes*? What *yesses* still hold, and how have they grown? What did they cost you?

Why not try this? In the evening, sit quietly and say to God: “Show me Lord, what did you say *yes* to in me today?” You may be surprised at his answer.

MOTHER HILDA SCOTT OSB

SEE BELOW FOR REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Reflection Questions

BREAKING OPEN THE WORD

1. Like Jesus, we often face temptation in our lives. In what ways do we seek popularity or prestige, rather than doing what we know to be right?
2. In what ways do we make choices based on satisfying our own desires instead of finding ways to serve others?
3. Jesus stands at the door of your heart. Do you hear him knocking? What prevents us from opening that door?

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

1. Today's Gospel finds Jesus in the wilderness. Are you afraid of the unknown—of “the desert”? How could a time of solitude, a time

to examine ourselves, help us as we start our Lenten journey?

2. Even when we are in “the wilderness,” Jesus is with us. How have you sensed that presence in times of worry and difficulty?
3. What are some things you have said “no” to in your life because you have said a larger “yes” already? What are some of the other *yesses* you need to proclaim today?

CLOSING PRAYER AND INTERCESSIONS

Lord, every day you put a question to me. I do not know if I have answered, and yet I want to answer “yes”. For I know that a life given in *yesses* to you, a life in surrender to you, is the only thanks I can make for the *yes* you constantly give me. Amen.