

GOSPEL

Matthew 5:17-37

Jesus was led by the Spirit out into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, after which he was very hungry, and the tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to turn into loaves.' But he replied, 'Scripture says:

Man does not live on bread alone
but on every word that comes from the
mouth of God.'

The devil then took him to the holy city and made him stand on the parapet of the Temple. 'If you are the Son of God,' he said, 'throw yourself down; for scripture says:

He will put you in his angels' charge,
and they will support you on their hands
in case you hurt your foot against a stone.'
Jesus said to him, 'Scripture also says:
You must not put the Lord your God to the test.'

Next, taking him to a very high mountain, the devil showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. 'I will give you all these', he said, 'if you fall at my feet and worship me.' Then Jesus replied, 'Be off, Satan! For scripture says:

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

Then the devil left him, and angels appeared and looked after him.

REFLECTION OF POPE LEO XIV

22 February 2026

Today, on the First Sunday of Lent, the Gospel tells us about Jesus who, led by the Spirit, enters the desert and is tempted by the devil (cf. Mt 4:1–11). After fasting for forty days, he feels the weight of his humanity: physically, through hunger, and morally, through the devil's temptations. In this, he experiences the same struggle we all face on our journey. By resisting the evil one, he demonstrates how we, too, can overcome the devil's deception and snares.

Through this Word of life, the liturgy invites us to view Lent as a luminous path. By means of prayer, fasting and almsgiving, we can renew our

cooperation with the Lord in the crafting of our lives as a unique masterpiece. This involves allowing him to cleanse the stains and heal the wounds of sin, as we commit to letting our lives blossom in beauty until they attain the fullness of love — the only source of true happiness.

To be sure, this is a demanding journey. There is always the risk of discouragement or of being drawn to easier paths to satisfaction, such as wealth, fame and power (cf. Mt 4:3–8). These temptations, which Jesus himself faced, are merely poor substitutes for the joy for which we were created. Ultimately, they leave us dissatisfied, restless and empty.

For this reason, Saint Paul VI taught that penance — far from impoverishing our humanity — enriches, purifies and strengthens it, as we move toward a horizon that has "as its aim love and surrender to God" (Apostolic Constitution *Paenitemini*, 17 February 1966, I). Indeed, while penance makes us aware of our limitations, it also grants us the strength to overcome them and to live, with God's help, in deeper communion with him and with one another.

In this time of grace, let us therefore practice penance generously, alongside prayer and works of mercy. Let us create space for silence by turning off televisions, radios and cell phones for a while. Let us meditate on the Word of God, approach the Sacraments, and listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit who speaks to us in our heart. Let us also listen to one another — in our families, workplaces and communities. Let us dedicate time to those who are alone, especially the elderly, the poor and the sick. By giving up what is superfluous, we can share what we save with those in need. Then, as Saint Augustine taught, our prayer offered in this way — "in humility and charity, by fasting and giving, by restraining ourselves and pardoning, by paying out good deeds and not paying back bad ones, by turning away from evil and doing good" (Sermons, 206, 3) — will reach heaven and give us peace.

We entrust our Lenten journey to the Virgin Mary, our Mother who always assists her children in times of trial.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/Homily?



Head: Why does the Spirit lead Jesus into the wilderness before his public ministry begins, and what does that reveal about the role of silence, hunger, and testing in spiritual maturity?



Heart: Where in my life do I resist silence because it exposes my restlessness, attachments, or fears — and what might God be trying to show me there?



Hands: What concrete step will I take this week to create intentional space for silence — not as escape, but as a place to listen more deeply to God's Word?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another:

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. “Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray”)
3. Offer prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps praying the 'Glory Be'.