

# First Sunday of Lent

## Year C



**FIRST READING**  
**Deuteronomy 26:4–10**

**PSALM**  
**Psalm 91:1–2, 10–15**

**SECOND READING**  
**Romans 10:8–13**

**GOSPEL**  
**Luke 4:1–13**

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### PRAYER

#### Psalm 91:1–2, 10–15

You who live  
in the shelter of the Most High,  
who abide  
in the shadow of the Almighty,  
will say to the LORD,  
“My refuge and my fortress;  
my God, in whom I trust.”  
no evil shall befall you,  
no scourge come near your tent.  
For he will command his angels  
concerning you  
to guard you in all your ways.  
On their hands they will bear you up,  
so that you will not dash your foot  
against a stone.  
You will tread  
on the lion and the adder,  
the young lion and the serpent  
you will trample under foot.  
Those who love me, I will deliver;  
I will protect those  
who know my name.  
When they call to me,  
I will answer them;  
I will be with them in trouble,  
I will rescue them and honor them.

### READING THE WORD

#### First Reading Deuteronomy 26:4–10

When the priest takes the basket  
from your hand and sets it down be-

fore the altar of the Lord your God,  
you shall make this response before  
the Lord your God: “A wandering  
Aramean was my ancestor; he went  
down into Egypt and lived there as  
an alien, few in number, and there  
he became a great nation, mighty  
and populous. When the Egyptians  
treated us harshly and afflicted us,  
by imposing hard labor on us, we  
cried to the Lord, the God of our  
ancestors; the Lord heard our voice  
and saw our affliction, our toil, and  
our oppression. The Lord brought  
us out of Egypt with a mighty hand  
and an outstretched arm, with a ter-  
rifying display of power, and with  
signs and wonders; and he brought  
us into this place and gave us this  
land, a land flowing with milk and  
honey. So now I bring the first of  
the fruit of the ground that you, O  
Lord, have given me.” You shall set  
it down before the Lord your God  
and bow down before the Lord your  
God.

#### Second Reading Romans 10:8–13

But what does the Scripture say?  
“The word is near you,  
on your lips and in your heart”  
that is, the word of faith that we  
proclaim; because if you confess  
with your lips 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. 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 and is generous  
to all who call on him. For, “Every-  
one who calls on the name of the  
Lord shall be saved.”

#### Gospel Luke 4:1–13

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, re-  
turned from the Jordan and was  
led by the Spirit in the wilderness,  
where for forty days he was tempt-  
ed by the devil. He ate nothing at all  
during those days, and when they  
were over, he was famished. The  
devil said to him, “If you are the  
Son of God, command this stone to  
become a loaf of bread.” Jesus an-  
swered him, “It is written, ‘One does  
not live by bread alone.’”  
Then the devil led him up and  
showed him in an instant all the  
kingdoms of the world. And the  
devil said to him, “To you I will give  
their glory and all this authority; for  
it has been given over to me, and  
I give it to anyone I please. If you,  
then, will worship me, it will all  
be yours.” Jesus answered him, “It  
is written, ‘Worship the Lord your  
God, and serve only him.’”  
Then the devil took him to Jeru-  
salem, and placed him on the pin-

nacle of the temple, saying 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 protect you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"

Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

## HEARING THE WORD

### "Professing the Faith"

The season of Lent begins this Sunday. It is a time of intense preparation for the celebration and commemoration of the events on which the Christian faith rests. Fittingly, today's readings focus on the meaning of faith and the manner of professing it.

Today's first reading contains instructions for the celebration of the Feast of the Firstfruits, which commemorated God's gift of the land, and the gift of the Law, given during the Sinai covenant. The ritual of this Israelite feast involved the bringing of a basket with the first fruits of the wheat harvest to the Temple. The priest would take the basket from the one offering it, and set it before the altar, while the one who offered it recited a solemn formula, contained in today's reading.

Called by some "Israel's Creed", this formula related God's three acts involved in the creation of the Israelite nation. First, God chose "a wandering Aramean" who would become the founda-

tion of the nation. This acknowledges that Israel's forefathers, the Patriarchs, were nomadic shepherds of Aramaean origin. The last of them, Jacob, also called "Israel", settled in Egypt where his family became numerous. Second, the formula describes the Exodus. The Israelites, threatened with destruction by the oppressive Egyptians, were saved by God who miraculously liberated them from the house of slavery. Finally, God led the people through the wilderness and into an abundant and fertile land which they now possess, and which sustains them.

Making this "profession of faith" while offering the first fruits of the harvest, an Israelite was acknowledging that his entire existence was based on a series of God's gratuitous acts, which transformed wandering shepherds into a powerful and settled nation. Thus, Israel's faith was based entirely on the experience of God's election, salvation and sustenance. When they brought the first fruits of their God-given fields to the Temple on the Feast of the Firstfruits, the Israelites were publicly acknowledging God's grace and gifts in word and deed.

The second reading presents Paul's teaching on how one obtains salvation. He states that salvation depends on two distinctive acts - confessing Jesus as the Lord and believing in his resurrection. Confessing Jesus as the Lord needs to be done "with the

lips", which implies a public and open acknowledgment that Jesus is the Lord. Making such a statement publicly would carry very significant and potentially dangerous consequences for the one making it. In the eyes of unbelievers, Jesus was nothing more than a crucified criminal and a long-dead man. To call him "Lord" would be shocking and scandalous to both Jews and Gentiles. To the Jews who recognized the existence of only one true God, it would mean a dead man was claimed to be yet another divine person. To the Gentiles who accepted the supreme authority and divinity of the Roman emperor, it would mean that this dead man rivals the Emperor as the ruler of the world. Thus, a public claim that "Jesus is Lord" would require tremendous courage and firm conviction from the believer.

Believing in Jesus' resurrection needs to be done "in the heart". The ancient people understood the heart as the location for human thinking and decision-making powers, not the place of feelings and emotions. Furthermore, "belief" in the biblical language signifies making decisions and taking concrete actions, trusting and relying on someone or something one believes in. Paul implies here that a true believer chooses a lifestyle based on taking Jesus' resurrection as its foundation. To believe in the heart in Jesus' resurrection means living one's life influenced in some specific ways by the perspective of the resur-

rection and life after death.

Thus, for Paul, the profession of faith consists in a public acknowledgment that Jesus is divine combined with a lifestyle defined and shaped by confidence and trust in his resurrection. To profess that Jesus is the Lord means to live for Jesus as the Risen Lord. Such a confession brings righteousness, and leads to eternal salvation.

Before the start of his public ministry, Jesus had to make his own “profession of faith”, narrated in the story of his temptations or testing. Jesus’ threefold test takes place in the wilderness where he confronts the devil – God’s opponent whose goal is to disrupt and destroy God’s plans and purposes. The devil will attempt to stop Jesus from carrying out God’s work in the world.

First, the tempter challenges Jesus to turn stones into bread to satisfy his bodily hunger. Doing so would mean that Jesus uses his God-given miracle-working powers to satisfy his own needs. Jesus refuses, quoting Scripture to justify his decision. In this way, Jesus makes a powerful and clear declaration that he will use the powers given to him according to God’s will and for God’s purposes alone.

In the second test, the devil offers to make Jesus the supreme ruler of the world in exchange for an act of worship and submission to himself. Here, Jesus must choose his master – is he going to serve Satan or God? Quoting Scripture again, Je-

sus unequivocally declares his choice for God, despite Satan’s tempting offer.

The final test takes place on the top of the Jerusalem Temple, that is in God’s very presence. The devil, now quoting Scripture himself, tells Jesus to throw himself down, thus he challenges Jesus’ trust in God. Since Scripture states that God will surely protect his servant, the devil asks Jesus to test God and see whether God is true to his own word. The tempter attempts to sow a seed of doubt in Jesus’ mind as to whether God can be trusted, and whether Jesus will trust God without asking for a sign. Jesus’ answer based on Scripture reveals his absolute trust and confidence in God’s sure protection, without any signs needed to confirm it. Armed with this confidence Jesus will be able to face death, knowing that God will protect him in the end from its effects. Through these three tests, the devil attempted to prevent Jesus from carrying out God’s work. Relying on the guidance of Scripture Jesus passed these tests, confirming his “faith in God”, that is his confidence, commitment and unwavering determination to carry out God’s will and to serve God and God’s purposes alone.

The profession of faith theme links today’s three readings. At the Feast of the Firstfruits the Israelites professed their faith by offering the first fruits and reciting the history of God’s gracious acts that made them a nation. Paul defines the profession of faith as a

public declaration of Jesus as the Lord combined with a lifestyle based on trust and confidence in Jesus’ resurrection, and, therefore, in the resurrection of all his faithful. Such confidence would allow his followers to confront the dangers that would inevitably come after they had made their belief in Jesus as the Lord public. Jesus made his faith commitment by resisting the devil’s temptations and deciding to serve God alone and trust him unconditionally. These examples set the pattern of faith profession for all believers, who, with the Psalmist, can confidently state that the Lord is “my refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust.”

## **LISTENING TO THE WORD OF GOD**

On the day of marriage, a bridegroom and a bride hold hands and look into each other’s eyes. One after the other, they utter the sacred promise: “I take you to be my wife/husband. I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honour you all the days of my life.” Although they are unaware of what awaits them in the future, their faith in each other moves them to make that declaration. It is a public pledge of unflinching commitment and faithfulness till death do them part.

Faithfulness is sacred not only in the celebration of the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony but most importantly in any relationship with

God. The first reading which is set within the context of the Jewish Feast of First Fruits is a celebration of the faithfulness of God and at the same time a public declaration of faith in the Lord. Jesus exemplifies faith. There were enough human reasons for him to yield to the temptations of the devil in the desert and yet he resisted because his foremost priority was the faithfulness to the Word of God.

Like Jesus, there are moments when we find ourselves in desert-like situations. These are times of emptiness and dryness in prayer and in our relationships. At a time when one is hard up and there is no money available, a corrupt deal comes knocking at the door. In a period of great challenge in one's marriage, temptation slides in and beckons a person to seek forbidden pleasure elsewhere. In the face of calamity or great loss, doubts about the existence of God beseech us and the will to pray evaporates. Indeed, the depth of one's faith is best assessed in desert like situations.

Some prefer to celebrate their faith in private but not in public because of the price that comes with it. However, such a separation in the expression of faith betrays one's lack of faith. There is a proverb which says, "rain can soak a leopard's skin but it does not wash out its spots." Rain or sunshine, an authentic faith is evident in every situation. Like an oasis in the desert, the Word of God refresh-

es us when the going gets rough. Those who drink deep from the well of the Word find enough strength to journey without fainting.

In this season of Lent, we too are invited to enter into the desert and face its challenges. It is a journey to spiritual renewal. However, it is precisely on this journey that one finds huge temptations and obstacles. Understandably, Satan hates it when he sees God's children making spiritual progress. Like Jesus, we need to arm ourselves with deep faith in the Word of God if we are to overcome the wiles of the evil one. None of us should fall and crush our faith when tempted, but if it should happen, the Lord offers us the grace of restoration in the sacrament of reconciliation.

## PROVERB

*“Rain  
can soak  
a leopard’s skin  
but it does not  
wash out  
its spots.”*

## ACTION

### Self-examination:

What nourishes my faith and sustains my commitment to God?

Am I taking the spiritual exercises of prayer, fasting and almsgiving seriously during this season of Lent?

### Response to God:

I call to mind moments when I have lost faith in God and succumbed to temptations. I choose to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation as the first step towards renewal of faith.

### Response to your World:

In a secular world where people love to talk about everything except their faith, I will purposely choose to introduce faith matters in my conversation with friends and acquaintances.

What challenges and temptations do we face as a group? Guided by the Word of God, we discuss how to overcome them.

## PRAYER

*Eternal Father,  
as I put my faith in your Word,  
let me stand.  
Keep me from falling  
and breaking the covenant  
you have made with me.  
May faithfulness  
be my watchword  
in good times and in bad.  
For the sake of Christ, I pray.  
Amen.*