

The 1st Sunday of Lent - Year A – 2/22/2026 – Msgr. Peter Quang Nguyen

First Reading: Genesis 2:7-9; 3:1-7: God formed man and placed him in Eden. The serpent deceived the woman into eating the forbidden fruit. She and her husband ate it and realized they were naked.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 51: Lord, have mercy and cleanse us from our sins. Create a clean heart and renew our spirits. Restore our joy and open our lips to praise you.

Second Reading: Romans 5:12-19: One man's sin brought death to all, but God's grace through Jesus brings life and righteousness to many. Christ's obedience will make many righteous.

Gospel: Matthew 4:1-11: Jesus was tempted by the devil after fasting in the desert. He resisted, quoting Scripture each time. Afterward, the devil left, and angels came and cared for him.

My Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

As a human being, Jesus accepted to enter into a trial, just as all of us face trials every day in our earthly journey. Who among us is not tempted by material things, personal desires, and the pursuit of fame and power?

Today's Gospel recounts Jesus' journey into the desert to be tempted, marking the beginning of his mission to preach the Good News—a beginning similar to Moses and Elijah's 40 days and nights on the mountain of God (cf. Exodus 24:18; 1 Kings 19:8). The 40 days of fasting symbolize the 40 weeks of gestation, the time of preparation for a new birth, which for Jesus was the preparation for the birth of a new humanity, a new creation. The number 40 also recalls the 40 years in the desert when the Israelites faltered, wanting to return to the fleshpots of Egypt, worshipping the golden calf, and repeatedly complaining against God. But today, Jesus overcame these same temptations.

Two temptations are very clear and realistic, striking at human nature: the temptation of food (material possessions) and the temptation of fame and power; along with a more subtle temptation—that of self-expression, the desire to assert oneself, to worship one's own abilities and instincts, and pride. With a little discernment, we can easily see that all three temptations aimed to undermine Jesus' Messianic mission. However, all the temptations were thwarted by Jesus through the Word of God and through his steadfast wisdom gained through fasting.

1. The temptation of material things.

The tempter began by targeting Jesus' hunger, suggesting that He use His Messianic power to "transform" stones into bread: "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread!" - "*If you are the Son of God...*" The tempter cleverly suggests Jesus' Messianic identity, while simultaneously posing a challenge and a question: "*if.*" Jesus could have transformed stones into bread, just as He later multiplied loaves to feed the people; however, He did not fall for the deception of the "liar" and satisfy its demands, because God acts according to His own will, not at the behest of Satan. Specifically, Jesus did not succumb to Satan's provocation or satisfy His own needs by deviating from His Messianic mission and the will of His Father. The Messianic mission is ultimate, not temporary; it is for the salvation of humanity, not for the satisfaction of personal needs; it is liberation through

the cross, not through worldly triumph. This temptation is no different from the final challenge of the chief priests and the wicked thief: ***"If you are the Son of God, save yourself, come down from the cross..."***

- In response to the temptation, Jesus presents a principle of balance between material and spiritual life, between body and soul: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." Faced with temptation, Jesus uses the power of God's word, affirming the purpose He has chosen and asserting that He will not lose eternal life for the sake of fleeting physical satisfaction.

This is also a persistent temptation for all of us, the temptation of food and drink being at the forefront of the seven deadly sins. Hunger can drive us to seek every means, even the most despicable, including committing sin, to satisfy our stomachs. We are also tempted to use the gifts God has given us only for our own benefit and for fleeting advantages. We often worry only about material wealth and abundance, but our souls are weak because they are starving for grace, starving for the Word of God, and starving for the Eucharist. God does not advocate poverty but teaches us that while we work to provide for our physical needs, we also need to care for the life of our souls, because: *"Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."*

2. The Temptation to Show Off

The tempter uses the tactic of appealing to the ego, stimulating a person's desire to showcase their personality, abilities, and self-esteem.

- "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down! For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'"

The tempter cleverly inserts Jesus into the Israelites' idea of the Messiah, which was to raise a rebellion, destroy their enemies, become emperor, and lead Israel to glory. It suggests that Jesus should use violence to solve problems, using his Messianic power in a human way, to prove his abilities, his ego, and his self-glorification.

- Furthermore, in the temptation concerning food, Jesus used Scripture to counter Satan, but here Satan cunningly quotes Scripture (Psalm 91:12) to illustrate his temptation: "For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" This shows that people can use Scripture – the Word of God – to justify their intentions, distorting Scripture to suit their ego and self-interest.

- Ultimately, it boils down to challenging God to act, questioning why an all-powerful God would allow such injustice and suffering in the universe or in life? If God exists, where is He? Why do Catholics, who believe in God, experience misfortune and persecution? This stems from seeking easy success through ostentatious displays of triumph, instead of patiently carrying out God's plan as He intended.

- Some have wondered why sexuality isn't mentioned in this temptation, as it's one of the easiest areas to fall into temptation. In reality, the temptation to express the self, the ego, to prove oneself, and to indulge in pride... already encompasses sexuality, as it's a manifestation and satisfaction of instinct.

Thus, although not explicitly stated, the temptation of self-expression is one of the easiest temptations for people to fall into; it targets everyone's self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-love; who doesn't want to prove themselves to others, even resorting to deception to gain recognition...?

3. The temptation of fame.

The third temptation, which the "tempter" used to try to force Jesus into a fundamental choice regarding his salvific mission and a dispute over dominion over humanity, was:

“The devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. And he said to him, ‘I will give you all this, if you will fall down and worship me.’”

- The devil knew that Jesus had come to earth to obey the Father and reclaim humanity for God, so he tried to lure Jesus into compromising with him, granting him dominion without suffering, gaining all glory and honor through an easy path without the cross, provided that Jesus accepted a compromise with Satan instead of obeying the Father's will.

- This is a temptation that all of us face every day. We are constantly confronted with a challenge and a crucial choice: **to choose God or to choose Satan and the worldly benefits and glory?** The truth is, to achieve wealth and power, some people are not afraid to "deny God," abandoning His laws and their faith to sell themselves to worldly gain. More subtly, to get a job, to keep their position in secular society, fearing trouble or ridicule from friends... they hide their Catholic identity. Wanting security, fearing danger, they dare not bear witness to the truth. For the sake of a livelihood, they sell their conscience; for the sake of a position, they become servants of falsehood...

- Jesus resolutely chose to obey the Father's will, accepting hardship and loss, driving Satan away, and reclaiming dominion for God. Today, Jesus is also inviting everyone to be courageous, to allow God to take control and drive Satan out of their lives.

In short, these three temptations ... The temptations that Jesus experienced in the desert are also the three enduring temptations that the pilgrim Church faces today, especially each one of us individually. Satan still tries to entice us to pursue selfishness and care only for our physical needs, forgetting the common good and the salvation of our souls; we still hope that God, in His power, will solve everything through violent punishment; we still, in some way, want to compromise with the sinful world for personal gain, fame, and power...

Lord Jesus, may this holy Lenten season help us return to the desert of our hearts, to see where we stand in God's path. Grant us the grace to renounce our bodily passions, to renounce our ego, and to resolutely choose You as the inheritance of our lives. Amen.