

St Pius & St Anthony 1st Sunday Lent Homily 2026 Year A

Jesus goes into the desert and the Devil goes after Him! What I mean is that the Devil throws all that he can at Jesus, trying to sabotage His ministry. What had just happened was Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River, which basically was the public revelation of Him, claimed as the Son of God, thru testimony of the Father's own voice and Holy Spirit's presence as dove! (Mt 3:16-17) Jesus then moves into the desert for a retreat-style debriefing to commune further with the Father and Spirit, (to show Divine Unity and prepare for the rollout of His public ministry) . And what does the Devil do, but tries to wedge between them, sowing doubt & discord between them - Notice the Devil's play-trick of repeating the insinuation '**if** you are son of God' in his first two temptations, & throughout his temptations, the ego-selfish suggestion, "Do something for yourself-Have it Your way -the Father isn't giving it you.... First the Devil says, 1)Make your own bread, then the Devil comes at Jesus suggesting He 2)force the Father's hand to perform dramatic miracle saving him in a dangerous spectacle of his own making, and then the devil finally ends up offering a deception, 3)take the kingdoms I'm offering you-juts bow down to me – insidiously implying, "What has the father ever offered you...."

Yet isn't this 'divide & conquer' trick, exactly what the Devil used against Adama & Eve, wedging them apart (in our first reading from Genesis 3) from the beginning, by turning them against each other, having them blame & shame each other: Adam saying, "She did it-not me" – and the Eve saying, "No, he didn't warn me" & then both them saying, 'No, the snake was behind it all.' It worked with them. But not with Jesus, who obediently, triumphs over the seductive offers of the devil. I grant that the devil is certainly arrogant to attempt seducing Jesus to evil, (but isn't that what **pride** does?) But Jesus stays strong and the devil leaves (but only for a while - He'll be back) I love how the gospel of Matthew suggests a neat parallel between these three temptations at the start of Jesus' ministry and three more temptations at the end of Jesus' ministry on the cross. Mt 27:40-43 will tell of three more times Jesus being taunted with similar divisive language and a mocking attack on His relationship to the Father & Spirit. The Devil will accusatorily goad Jesus through the crowd's derision, saying again, "**if** you are Son of God, save yourself...." (v 40) & then again tempting him "come down from cross and we'll believe in you" (v 42) and finally, "He claimed He was 'Son of God' then the let Father deliver Him...." (v 43). But again there too, Jesus triumphs through these final three temptations. He remains focused on His relationship & the Father's Will as well as the Godly kingdom mission He came to inaugurate on earth, as it is in heaven!

But we want to be on guard, that if the Devil will go after Jesus, (what pride!) then count on it, he'll come at us! So, while we take up this 40 day season of renewed conversion and commitment to Christ, going into the desert with Jesus, remember that the devil is in the desert too – trying to distract or divide us from Jesus, as the devil doesn't want us any closer, and more faithful to Christ. So, plan on it. Devil will be busy, to diminish any increase in devotion you plan to take up, and He will try pulling down any progress we attempt to make in deepening our relationship to Christ.

What might be our temptations in Lent? Probably, our first temptation we need to overcome is the simple one, to not take Lent seriously. To miss our opportunity to grow in faith with Christ. The devil would only be most happy to deflate us with resigned pessimism, "Oh, you can't change - nothing is different – don't even try'. But, NO, with God 'all things are possible' (Mt 19:26). Of course, things/people change – don't we see that all day long? Often don't we actually complain about that – "What-It's different-changed again!" So, the same with us. Yes, God has great change-more life-giving change is store for us. But, we have to apply! I like to say that Lent is about 'dying to sin' with Jesus, so we can rise to 'new life' with Him come Easter. Yes certainly, Jesus is raised up at Easter, but by our baptism into Him (our renewal in Him-thru our spiritual program work of Lent-giving up sin habits – taking on new practices of prayer & charity), we can also be raised up to new life come Easter morning!

And we are not alone in taking up Lent, as a 40 day change camp to grow in faith. There has been a long history of faithful people of God, who take up seasons of strengthening their spirits (as if the mere example of Jesus modeling a 40 day period of deepened devotion is not enough to stimulate us to do similarly – we find examples of the two special guests of Jesus (next Sunday's gospel reading-Mt 17:3) at the Transfiguration Moses (Ex 34:28, Deut 9:18-19) and Elijah (1 Kgs 19:8) who took on 40 day periods of prayer/fasting to draw closer to God, change and prepare for greater mission God (We Catholics have always done Lent – but I remember when a fellow Christian pastor made such a concept popular among a lot of other denominations several years ago with his series of books like '40 Days of Purpose' & 'Purpose Driven Life'). Well, Lent brings that opportunity for us to step up our spiritual life with Christ, just keep in mind that the devil will tempt us to not even try.

Or the devil's next likely temptation is to trip you up here at the beginning, with your first stumble to discourage you, and have you give it up all together ('See I told you" devil will taunt at us). Maybe we've discovered quickly how

difficult it is to set down that phone, or better-turn it off! Or after starting Lent with an extra ½ hour morning meditation prayer, your schedule has fallen apart with crises that have you al rearranged already. Well, don't give up, just get back at it. Or if you meant to start volunteering service for a neighbor or local charity and you haven't followed thru yet, don't walk away from it, quit, just make that call this week or better just go show up/visit. Any step is a good step toward serving Christ in His people. God will open up a great beginning for you. Or if your sacrifice (whatever you gave up) has not worked out (substitute now a different one- give up a game to read a book, give up news-watching or scrolling to write a letter, give up a purchase to contribute to your favorite charity. Clean out a closet, declutter a cabinet-or simply walk somewhere-park or store!

Come Easter, we can celebrate rising to life-new with Jesus, thru new habits of grace, new routines of devotion and new practices of living & sharing Christ's goodness with others.