

## St Pius & St Anthony Homily 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent Year C (2025)

When I was a kid, inevitably as one of us kids would take on a project of building a house of cards, we might successfully get a simple rectangle laid out, and plan big to add a second story, and right about then, a brother would conveniently sneeze and down it comes! Its just the way it goes! Count on it! Or maybe like I'm at parents for a dinner, and I walk into the kitchen and mom says, "Try a bite of this slaw, see what needs adding" and I say, "I can't I just brushed my teeth." She says, "Oh you don't want to mess your teeth up" and I say, "No, its just that everything will taste bad after toothpaste burn!" Similar to someone at dinner saying, "Try this delicious steak- but if I have moved on to 'after dinner coffee', I'm on to sweet mode, the salt-spice buds are turned off." It just happens. The way it goes!

And Lent goes a certain way too: Count on it, as we enter the desert with Jesus – the devil is coming too, a wannabe spoiler for our Lenten change and transformation. The devil will be tempting us too. I always say that if the devil is bold enough to try tempting the Savior Jesus, then we can bet the devil will turn to us as easy-pickings (ready made targets). So we will be tempted by the devil this Lent too. What kind of temptations? Well, the first may be to simply not observe Lent or not take Lent seriously as the opportunity for change and conversion that it invites us to take up. We may minimize or downplay possibility of our real spiritual growth this Lent – through works of prayer, fasting and charity. Or a second temptation may be to give up our holiness resolution altogether at the first stumble or back slide we encounter. Maybe we slip in our plans or break our commitment after a week and are tempted to just 'scratch' and wait for next year. No, get up and get back at it! Simply start over – we have six weeks! Don't do the devil's work for him. Devil would want us to ignore Lent's chance for change & to give up on conversion and spiritual growth at the first bump in the road.

So we go into the desert with Jesus, and yes, the devil will make a show too, but we are not alone, because the Holy Spirit comes out with us too. Luke 4:1 says Jesus was "led by the Spirit into the desert." So, the Holy Spirit comes out with us to for help. I like to point out that Jesus enters the desert right after His baptism in the Jordan River by John (Spirit-come down), and immediately after the desert temptation period, Jesus will proceed to His hometown Nazareth to inaugurate His mission with the announcement, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me..." (Lk 4:18-19). So, what does this desert interlude serve, but as a period of retreat and consolidation of His message (a time communing with the Father to clarify His mission-like training camp!) The desert does that to us! It is a place of focus and concentration. Why does Jesus go out to the desert or why do we go out there with Him? Because, *special things happen* in the desert (*not to mention the special bible number 40 for change – forty days/forty nights of Noah in ark before new creation, forty years Hebrews wandered in desert to enter promised land, forty days both Moses*

*and Elijah spent on deserts and mountaintops – to receive God-revelations or epiphanies)*  
Special things happen in the desert. To start, it is a quiet place that invites us to listen. We listen to ourselves, what comes up – questions from within us- how are we doing, what is next for us? But also God will speak to us as we listen, and we will hear things we maybe have never heard before. How about Silence? God often speaks in silence, when we are still, when nothing out here is rattling on-when we aren't entertained by trending memes, phone beeps and flashing notifications. In silence, God's message, comes up from within us. I can think of how God spoke to Elijah in the "tiny whispering wind" (1Kings 19:11-13) or how prophet Hosea reports that "God will lead his people to the desert and speak in silence of our heart" (Hosea 2:16). So God will speak to us in quiet, when we listen. But the desert is also a deliberate place to go (you don't just wake up one day and say 'I'm going to visit desert today"). The desert returns us to the basics- we don't drag any baggage into desert – no, we let go of extras, and simplify life. What do I really need, in this thing called life! But the desert can also be an intense place! The stakes are high – you live or you don't -no playing around in the desert! No luxuries to put our faith in – there are risks everywhere, and this is where the devil enters in again. Count on it -there are forces, influences pressures (anything that would lead us away from God—we call devilish) that wish to work against us – to meddle between us and God to throw us off track or stop us. It just happens that as we seek to deepen our life in God, that threatens the devil, so he will try to wedge in between us and God.

*(I say the 'devil goes down to desert' to tempt Jesus much like why the bank robber answered the judge, when the judge asked "Why did you rob the bank?" and the convicted robber answered "Because that is where the money is kept!" Wherever good is going on, the devil prowls around that, to disrupt it. The Devil's game is always to lead us away from the good - that is God.)*

So, we can learn a lot from Jesus' temptations (what exactly were they?)

- 1) Stones to bread – The **Sin of Pleasure** for Pleasure's Sake (Lk 4:3)
- 2) All World Kingdoms given to you, just worship devil-**Sin of Power** (Lk 4:6-7)
- 3) Vanity Miracle Spectacle –Jumping off Temple Spire -**Sin of Pride** (Lk 4:9-11)

These favorite temptations of the Devil (*same temptations present in Adam/Eve's fall in Genesis 3:1-6 'fruit was pleasing to eyes...desirable for gaining wisdom over others...to be like gods...'*) are meant to trip us up in relationship to God, as Empty pleasures drain our spiritual reserves of good, feed our greed for power/control to interfere with other people's growth, and puffs up our spiritual arrogance/pride to alienate us from God. I love how Jesus reveals so much to us about our eternal happiness, by simply speaking back to the Devil God's own words (He **humbly** responds with a simple quote from scripture =this proves his deep communion with the Father!) Jesus responds each time with a defensive word of scripture (*good tactic to fight devil – have a ready scripture reference at hand ourselves for every temptation-a good Lenten project would be to*

write up your own personal 'survival handbook' of Jesus' words for every test you may face- feeling sad, here's a quote, feeling angry, here's a quote, feeling jealous, here's a quote, etc....)

What does Jesus specifically, say back:

- 1) "One does not live by bread alone.' "(Deut 8:3)

*Later Jesus will teach, "For life is more than food and the body more than clothing." Luke 11:23*

- 2) "You shall worship the Lord, your God alone" (Deut 6:13)

*Later Jesus will teach, "What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life (lose his soul)" Matthew 16:26*

- 3) "You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test" (Deut 6:16)

*"**seek first the kingdom** and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides" Matthew 6:33-34*

We do not fight alone, against the devil's temptations to ignore/avoid Lent's invitation to grow closer to God or to tempt us to give up trying at our first failure. No, the Holy Spirit strengthens us in our trial and Jesus is with us in this desert. The scripture words of Jesus, ready at hand for us to use in response to any temptation by the devil, can defend us along with the most powerful weapon Jesus models for us, which is humility. St Francis DeSales taught that '**Humility** (opposite of *Pride-as we know we need God*) scares the devil to death; it drives him away-he wants nothing to do with it-fearing it may rub off on him!' So as we start our Lent, may we withstand the Devil's attack and deepen our faith, growing in relationship to Christ and His Holy People of the Church, one another!

James 4:7 "So submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil, and **he will flee from you.**"

"It was pride that changed angels into devils; it is humility that makes men as angels."

- Saint Augustine of Hippo