

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT
Year B: Gen 9:8-15; Ps 25; 1Pet 3:18-22; Mk 1:12-15
February 21, 2021
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The forty days of this season of Lent are based on the forty days that Christ spent in the desert, as we just heard in the Gospel. Jesus was about to begin the work of redemption for which He was born. His quiet, peaceful life of obscurity as a carpenter in Nazareth was coming to an end, and He was about to begin His public work of preaching the message of conversion and salvation. He knew He would face great opposition and would eventually undergo the great trial of His Passion and death.

And so, to prepare Himself for this great work, Jesus retreated to the desert for a time of intense prayer. The other Gospel accounts tell us that Jesus fasted for the forty days that He was in the desert (cf. Mt 4:2; Lk 4:2), and He was also tested by Satan, who tried to get Jesus to betray God the Father for His own profit and gain (cf. Mt 4:9; Lk 4:6). But Jesus resisted these temptations and remained faithful to His Father and to His mission of redeeming the world. As He was about to begin His saving work, He spent this time in the desert to focus and strengthen Himself. It was a time of spiritual training, you could say, to prepare for the great trial of His life, when He would be asked to offer His life on the Cross for the salvation of the world.

Just as Christ prepared Himself for His work of redemption and the trial of His Passion, so do we prepare ourselves during Lent to celebrate the Paschal Mystery during Holy Week and Easter and to live the rest of our lives. Each year, Lent gets us ready to remember what Christ did for us, but it might also be preparing us for some great trial in life, some great test to come in the future, when we will need to be strengthened and rooted in our faith. We should try to see each Lent as part of our lifelong spiritual training and conditioning, to get our souls ready for whatever may come in life, and also for the greatest moment of our lives, which will be when we finally meet Christ.

For example, it could be that this Lent is when a person might begin a new discipline of prayer, perhaps the devotion of praying the Rosary each day. This discipline of calling on the intercession of the Holy Mother of God every day could have great consequences for a person's life, because it may bring divine assistance now or at the hour of death. Or, maybe this Lent is when a person might begin to read the Gospels and become more familiar with the teachings and words of Christ.

Then, in the future, when some great trial presents itself, the person will be better prepared to recall the words of Christ that offer guidance and instruction, such as His warning, “*You cannot serve both God and mammon*” (Mt 6:24) at a moment of temptation to greed.

Or, perhaps this Lent is when a person might adopt a new charity that will open his or her eyes to the needs of others and give a new perspective on life, or maybe even begin a new relationship with someone in need who will then be an instrument of God to turn the soul in a certain direction. This is often what happens when we make a dedication to charity – we *think* we are helping others, but God uses the others in need to help *us*, perhaps to adjust our priorities. Or, this Lent might also be a time when a person begins a new discipline of self-denial and self-restraint which conditions him or her to be ready to resist some great temptation to come in the future. The point is, whatever we do for Lent this year, and every year, might be getting us ready for the rest of our lives, just as Christ’s forty days in the desert got Him ready for the climax of His life, when He triumphed over the forces of darkness by surrendering His life on the Cross. In fact, Christ’s victory over the temptations of the devil in the desert foreshadowed His ultimate victory over the devil in His Passion (cf. *Catechism*, 539).

So, this Lent could have great consequences for the rest of our lives. Every year, Lent is a season of spiritual discipline and training that gets us ready for Easter, but it also gets us ready for life, and it could be that whatever we do for Lent this year, we might keep doing even after Lent, for life, as a way of becoming more religious and growing closer to Christ. As we pray in the liturgy for Lent, may we be “more eagerly intent on prayer and on the works of charity, [so that by] participating in the mysteries by which [we] have been reborn, [we] may be led to the fullness of grace” (Preface I of Lent). Amen.