

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

March 10, 2019 C

Facilitator: *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.*

Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *Creator God, you formed the first man and woman from the clay of the earth and breathed into them the spirit of life, but they turned from you and sinned. We also have turned from you and your ways. During this Lenten season of prayer, fasting and almsgiving, you call us back to you to repent of our sins. Be with us when we face temptations. Give us the strength we need to remain faithful to you. Draw the Elect preparing to join the Church this Easter, and all of us, closer to you during this season. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Response to last week's Word: [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week.*

Facilitator: One way to connect this week's readings is to see them as an invitation to be *faithful* to God's call or divine election. In the desert, both Israel and Jesus were *called* to be *faithful* to God. In the first reading, Moses reminds Israel of God's *faithfulness* to them and their call to be *faithful* to him. In the Gospel, Jesus shows *fidelity* to God by saying 'no' to Satan's temptations. In the second reading, Paul challenges his readers to show *faithfulness* to God by *living* what they profess with their lips.

Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is he wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.

Read the first reading, the psalm and the second reading, pausing briefly after each one.

FIRST READING: Deuteronomy 26:4-10

The Book of Deuteronomy is a series of instructions or homilies given by Moses to the Israelites before they enter the Promised Land.

In this week's reading, Moses tells the people that after their first harvest, they are to take the *first fruits* of the various products of the soil, put them in a basket and offer them to God as an act of thanksgiving. Then during their Harvest Festival, they are to tell the story of God's saving presence in their lives and in the lives of their ancestors. What follows is an important *creedal statement* which identifies three significant events in Israel's salvation history. *First*, there is a reference to a "wandering Armean" who ends up in Egypt. This is probably a reference to Jacob and his sons who went down to Egypt while Joseph was chancellor in Pharaoh's court. *Second*, the *Exodus* is memorialized as God hearing the cry of an enslaved people. *Third*, the giving of the *land* "flowing with milk and honey" is brought to mind. Moses reminds the people that their good and faithful God who entered into the history of their ancestors blessing them, *continues* to be a saving presence in their lives, blessing them *now* with a bountiful harvest.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 91

This psalm affirms the nation's reliance on God who delivers them out of slavery. He comes to them in time of trouble.

SECOND READING: Romans 10:8-13

These verses also contain a *creedal statement* of faith by the first Christians: "*Jesus is Lord; he died for our sins and was raised up for our justification.*" This faith involves "*confession on the lips*" and "*belief in one's heart*" – two aspects of the same act of faith. It is the equivalent of saying that faith has to be a "lived reality" in which the words one professes are backed up by the witness of one's life. A faith *confessed* and *lived* enables one to appropriate for oneself the gift of salvation offered by Jesus. Salvation is God's *free* gift to undeserving sinners. Our task is to graciously *receive* God's gift and then to *act* like saved people.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: Luke 4:1-13

As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.

**A participant reads the Gospel,
then all pause to reflect.**

As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.

**A participant reads the Gospel again,
then all pause to reflect.**

GOSPEL: Luke 4:1-13

In her introduction to the temptations of Jesus, Alice Camille writes:

The temptation story is a private moment in the otherwise very public life of Jesus. Away from the crowds, without the support of a friend, he has gone into the desert for one of the great spiritual struggles of his life. He will not battle for the life of his mission this way again until the final hour in Gethsemane. At both ends of his ministry, he has to lay down his will and take up that of his Father. Even for Jesus, it is never easy. (God's Word is Alive, p.257)

When Jesus goes to the desert, Luke reminds us that he is “filled with the Holy Spirit” who will empower him to say ‘No’ to the three temptations of Satan. Each temptation is an attempt by Satan to have Jesus *misuse* his power, to use it to serve himself rather than to serve others. In each temptation, Jesus quotes Scripture as a way to fight Satan.

- In the *first temptation*, Jesus is tempted to use his power to feed himself rather than to feed the people hungry for God's Word. Jesus *trusts* that God will care or provide for him in his time of need. Likewise, we are called to do the same.
- In the *second temptation*, Satan tempts Jesus to use his power for political and materialistic means. Chasing after material riches and self-centered power is a temptation for most if not all of us.
- In the *third temptation*, Satan tempts Jesus to use his power for show – to do something spectacular. Satan has the audacity to use Scripture as a way to snare Jesus. But Jesus rebuffs Satan with a third quote from Deuteronomy. Note that the Gospel ends on an ominous note: Satan departs “for a time.” He will return, especially in Gethsemane.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Turn to the person next to you and share what word/words or images in the readings caught your

attention? Did they comfort or challenge you or touch you in some other way?

The facilitator can decide which is more helpful: to share the next questions with the whole group, or to share in smaller groups of three or four.

2. How has your faith in God been tested? What helped you get through your time of testing? In other words, what are or have been deserts in your faith life?

3. Deep attachments can and often do get between us and our call to be attached to Jesus. Can you name one attachment that you would like to work on this Lent, e.g., less TV so you can have more quiet time?

4. “*One does not live on bread alone.*” What spiritual practices help to nurture your faith life?

5. Name one thing today's Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed and act on.

JOURNALING: *Having listened to God's Word and to others' reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what God is saying to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as he asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.*

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week's readings. Suggestion: Tackle with prayer and determination one attachment that tends to pull you away from making Jesus the center of your life.

SHARED PRAYER ON THE READINGS

FACILITATOR: Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion:

✠ *Jesus, give me the courage to name and take on one attachment in my life that hinders me from allowing you to be the center of my life.*

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

FACILITATOR: Let us now conclude with prayers of thanksgiving, petition and intercession. What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we wish to pray?

CLOSING PRAYER (together)

Lord Jesus, as you had the help of the Spirit to turn aside from the temptations that came to you during the time in the desert and the years of your ministry, help us to turn to this same Spirit to help us in our efforts to grow in faith, hope and charity this Lent.