



## CATHOLIC CONVERSATIONS ON THE SCRIPTURES

Archdiocese of Miami - Ministry of Christian Formation

February 14, 2016

First Sunday of Lent

### Gospel reading Luke 4:1-13 [To be read aloud]

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert for forty days, to be tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and when they were over he was hungry.

The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." Jesus answered him, "It is written, *One does not live on bread alone.*" Then he took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a single instant. The devil said to him, "I shall give to you all this power and glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I may give it to whomever I wish. All this will be yours, if you worship me." Jesus said to him in reply, "It is written: *You shall worship the Lord, your God, and him alone shall you serve.*" Then he led him to Jerusalem, made him stand on the parapet of the temple, and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written: *He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you, and: With their hands they will support you, lest you dash your foot against a stone.*" Jesus said to him in reply, "It also says, *You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.*" When the devil had finished every temptation, he departed from him for a time.

### Brief commentary:

In this first Sunday of the season of Lent, the readings highlight the spirit, character, and goal of this season.

It is a season of introspection, of deep soul-searching and self-evaluation, but also of daring repentance and new beginnings, of self-denial and austerity *for the sake of* the kingdom, and of the transformation that is conversion. In the highly commercial culture we live in, which continually tells us to indulge, this alone already makes Lent truly counter-cultural by reminding us of our truer and deeper reality of our humanity. Today's first reading from Deuteronomy recalls the saving acts of God on behalf of the people, freeing them from oppression and leading them to the land of promise. The psalmist is fully confident in God's power to help and to save, and the passage from Paul's letter to the Corinthians likewise expresses a bold faith in the Lord whose love for all is so great that it was personally manifested in the flesh, in Jesus. Everyone without exception, Paul exclaims, can be saved through faith in Jesus. In the gospel reading from Luke we find a Jesus whose wholehearted faith and loving devotion to God is so complete, so radical, so resolute, that no temptation can swerve him from serving God alone and God's saving plan for all humanity. The readings attest that this period of Lent has salvation in Christ as its goal. Salvation is always salvation *from* and salvation *for*: salvation *from* all that destroys us and our world, and it is salvation and freedom *for* faith, hope and love in God... freeing us *for* all that humanizes us and our world. In a world where wealth, power, fame, pleasure and narcissism seem prized above all else, we find Jesus – our exemplar – who decisively turns his back on all of these. Neither will he succumb to these himself nor will he use, in his mission, these conventional but futile ways in which people try to save themselves and their world. At the beginning of his ministry, of his mission, Jesus decides that real revolution has far more to do with love and compassion, mercy and kindness, justice and peace, than with weapons and terror, pleasures and tricks. In a consumerist society, so steeped with material commercial values that emphasize image and shallowness, materialism and entertainment, pleasure and selfishness as the means to happiness, the 'Jesus of the desert' reminds us of what Saint Teresa of Avila would one day realize: "Whoever has everything, but lacks God, has nothing; and whoever lacks everything, but possesses God, has everything." As Christians we too can begin to unconsciously adopt the world's godless ways of thinking and valuing, of living and behaving; and so Lent calls us to the desert, to abandon our hope in the idols and to let ourselves be drawn again by God to our true original covenantal love and be led by God's love. Lent is a returning to our foundations of faith and love of God, of renewal in that love, and of going forward beyond our self-imposed limits in order to accomplish the mission of Jesus in our own world, society, communities, and families. Let us dedicate this Lent especially for our Christian brothers and sisters in the Middle East and Africa, and in so many places, who daily face the arduous desert of brutal persecution and the merciless demon of genocidal obliteration. *May the Church unite this Lent and Easter to respond decisively to their needs and help them with the mercy that Jesus Christ calls all to!*

### Today's reading offers significant messages:

- Lent calls us to the desert, toward an authentic renewal of our faith, hope and love in God alone.
- The goal of Lent is to turn away from all that leads us away from God and from our neighbor in need in order to free us to respond more radically and more resolutely to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
- Led by the Spirit into the desert of Lent we prepare to participate in mystery of the Paschal week in union with Christians around the world, particularly those suffering the crucifixion of brutal persecution.

### For our shared or personal reflection:

*After a brief pause for silent reflection share your answers, ideas or feelings.*

- What do I need to say 'No' to this Lent in order to be able to say a greater 'Yes' to God?
- How can the 'desert spirituality' of introspection and self-denial allow me to grow closer to God?
- What can I do this Lent to be in solidarity with Christians around the world who are being put to the test by the demons of terrorism, persecution, and war?

**Suggested readings:** Catechism of the Catholic Church paragraphs 1163-73, 538-40