

## Readings First Sunday of Lent

### **2 Corinthians 6: 1-10**

Brethren, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For he says: "In an acceptable time I heard you, and on the day of salvation I helped you." Behold, now is a very acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation. We cause no one to stumble in anything, in order that no fault may be found with our ministry; on the contrary, in everything we commend ourselves as ministers of God, through much endurance, in afflictions, hardships, constraints, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, vigils, fasts; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, in a holy spirit, in unfeigned love, in truthful speech, in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness at the right and at the left; through glory and dishonor, insult and praise. We are treated as deceivers and yet are truthful; as unrecognized and yet acknowledged; as dying and behold we live; as chastised and yet not put to death; as sorrowful yet always rejoicing; as poor yet enriching many; as having nothing and yet possessing all things.

### **Matthew 4: 1-11**

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was hungry. The tempter approached and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become loaves of bread." He said in reply, "It is written: 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.'" Then the devil took him to the holy city and made him stand on the parapet of the temple, and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you' and 'with their hands they will support you, lest you dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus answered him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.'" Then the devil took him up to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in their magnificence, and he said to him, "All these I shall give to you, if you will prostrate yourself and worship me." At this, Jesus said to him, "Get away, Satan! It is written: 'The Lord, your God, shall you worship and him alone shall you serve.'" Then the devil left him and behold, angels came and ministered to him.

## ***Temptations***

First Sunday of Lent – 2 Cor. 6: 1-10 / Mt. 4: 1-11  
Ave Maria Catholic Church, March 6, 2022 - Fr. David M Vidal

The Gospel for this first Sunday of Lent leads us into the desert, the place that Jesus chose for the preparation of his public ministry. Afterward, Jesus begins preaching the Kingdom of God with these words: *“This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the Gospel.”*

And he travels from town to town, preaching, healing the sick, and forgiving sins. Finally, he takes up the Cross and walks to Mount Calvary, where He offers his life for our salvation.

Jesus chooses the desert as the prelude of his public ministry, and in that place, Jesus spends forty days and forty nights of fasting and prayer. All these things he does for us. He fasts for us, He prays for us, and He also suffers temptations for us. Yes, because He wants to teach us by saying: “follow me.” Follow me into the desert, follow me into a life of penance, follow me into a life of prayer, and follow me by overcoming temptations.

Temptations are not supposed to be stumbling blocks on our path towards heaven. On the contrary, thanks to Jesus, we discover that temptations can be the steppingstones that lead us closer to God. God allows temptations to happen in our lives. Why? Because He wants to turn those moments of trials into moments of victory.

God allows us to be tempted by the devil, the world, and our fallen nature, but at the same time, He gives us the necessary graces to resist temptations. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Saint Paul teaches: *“God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able,”* (1 Cor 10: 13).

### **For this reason, temptations become for us a school of life.**

Temptations are a school of humility. When the time of temptation comes, we realize that we are not as strong as we thought we were. We can feel the sting of temptation, which is a motive for humiliation. When tempted, we realize more fully our weak points and our needs. Most significantly, we become aware of the necessity of grace. Then, we pray.

That is the clear testimony of Saint Paul, who says, *“A thorn was given me in the flesh, an angel of Satan, to beat me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I begged the Lord about this; that it might leave me; but he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness,’”* (2 Cor. 12).

### **Temptations are a school of spiritual progress.**

Sometimes we may live in the platitude of a lukewarm life. We may naively think that we are already saved since we do not kill or steal. And we can be so happy with ourselves that we rest on our accomplishments without making any further effort.

But when temptations come, they awaken us. They make us realize the necessity of moving forward, not stopping midway. Temptations help us know that we need to pray and pray every day as Jesus told us: *“lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.”* And not only that, but we also need to practice virtue to do good and to avoid evil.

### **Temptation is a school of love.**

Do not think that when you experience temptations you are farther from God, because God allows his friends to be tempted. In the book of Tobit, it is written: *“Because you were acceptable to God, it was necessary that temptation should prove you.”* (Tobit 12: 13).

This is also the lesson we learn when we read the book of Job. The just man Job lost one thing after another. He even experienced suffering on his skin when he was affected by a terrible illness. His wife tempted Job, saying: *“Curse God and die!”* (Job 2: 9).

Job never cursed God. On the contrary, he consistently lived according to the words he had spoken when he learned that he had lost everything: oxen, donkeys, sheep, camels, servants, and even his sons and daughters: *“Naked I came forth from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I go back again. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!”* (Job 1: 21).

As Saint Ignatius tells us in the book of Spiritual Exercises, sometimes God allows us to suffer temptations to see what is our worth, or how much we love what is true, what is good, what is noble, what is pure, in other words, how much we love God.

### **Watch and Pray**

In the Gospels, Jesus also teaches us how to conquer temptations. On the night when Judas was about to give the kiss of treason, Peter, James, and John, were the ones chosen to be closer to Jesus, to experience the sufferings of Jesus’ sorrows and distress on the Mount of Olives.

However, the three disciples could not keep their eyes open, and they fell asleep. Jesus comes back to them, a first time, a second time, and even a third time. And Jesus tells them: *“Watch and pray that you do not enter into temptation,”* (Matt. 26: 41).

## **The Christian's arms against temptations are watchfulness and prayer:**

**Watchfulness is necessary to overcome temptations:** Anyone who is not on his guard is for that very reason in danger of falling into temptation. The threat is greater for a good man who presumes on his strength than for a sinner who confesses his weakness. The one who presumes, is more likely to lower his guard thinking that nothing evil will happen to him, but as soon as he lowers his guard, he is defeated.

**Watchfulness consists of avoiding occasions of sin:** As the book of Sirach tells us: *“Those who love danger will perish in it.”* (Sirach 3: 26)

**Watchfulness consists of constant fidelity.** It is not a practice reserved for extraordinary moments in our lives. Fidelity is not reserved for the days of Advent or Lent, but it is the condition of our entire life here on earth. Always faithful! Watchfulness means constant fidelity to loving God and our neighbor. Constant fidelity means more than good intentions; in reality, it means genuine, concrete, and persevering acts of love.

### **Now, watchfulness would be incomplete without prayer.**

Who can patiently watch, all the time, day after day, without God’s help? And how can we obtain God’s help if we do not ask for it?

The Lord told us: *“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.”* (Mt. 7:7–8)

Trials, difficulties, and temptations will always be with us. For this reason, prayer must always be with us too. We may become impatient and be tempted to say: *“enough.”* But we should remember that we are not the first of those who need to repeat our prayers. Three times St. Paul asked to be delivered from an annoying temptation, which God permitted, and what was Our Lord's response? My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness. (2 Cor. 12: 9).

Then, we should also pray, saying: *“My Father, if it is not possible that this cup passes without my drinking it, your will be done!”* (Mt 26: 42).

As we begin this holy season of Lent, let us accompany Jesus, who goes into the desert to give us an example to follow. With vigilance and prayer, let us strive to overcome temptations. Amen