

# Homily for the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent, Year C

March 9, 2025

St. Bavo Parish

Rev. Peter J. Pacini, C.S.C.

*First Reading: Deuteronomy 26:4-10 (How to make a proper offering to the Lord.)*

*Responsory: Psalm 91 (Be with me, Lord, when I am in trouble.)*

*Second Reading: Romans 10:8-13 (Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.)*

*Gospel: Luke 4:1-13 (The temptations in the desert.)*

The devil failed miserably in this battle of wits with Jesus, but I give him high marks for effort and creativity. He tried one temptation after another, but nothing worked. Jesus saw right through every trick, and skillfully avoided every trap. He kept sight of his priorities at all times. And, he drew upon the Word of God as his greatest weapon. Every attempt at deception was countered with a stiff dose of *truth* from the Scriptures.

This passage, while entertaining, is also quite instructive. The three temptations are not simply random attempts to trip up Jesus. Each one is carefully directed at a weak spot that many of us experience. The devil knew where human beings are most vulnerable, and those are the areas that he probed, hoping that Jesus would succumb as easily as we often do. If we carefully study Jesus' responses, we might pick up some helpful tips that we can apply whenever we face similar trials.

In the first temptation, Jesus is physically hungry, but he refuses to turn stones into bread in order to satisfy his hunger. He quotes from the Book of Deuteronomy, where Moses tells the Israelites that God first allowed them to go hungry and then fed them with manna in order to teach them an important lesson: "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." By first causing and then alleviating their hunger, God was trying to teach his people to recognize their *deeper* needs and turn to him for *spiritual* nourishment. In other words, God wanted to fill their *souls*, not just their stomachs.

Voluntary fasting, if done wisely, can teach us the same lesson. By denying certain bodily appetites for a time, we can learn to understand their relative importance in our lives. Hunger and thirst are necessary, because they help us to regulate our nutrition and keep us healthy. Other appetites and cravings for physical sensations can also play a constructive role in our lives. But all of them can get out-of-hand if we're not careful. We can easily get in the habit of indulging our appetites to an unhealthy extreme. And when we do, we find ourselves losing our self-control and neglecting our *deeper* desires. We forget that human beings are bodily *and* spiritual creatures, who live not by bread alone, but by "every word that comes from the mouth of God." Whatever form of fasting we may choose to try during this Lenten season, it should draw us into this mystery, reminding us of our deep, abiding *hunger for God*.

A secondary benefit of fasting is that it can show us just how attached we have become to certain pleasures. We may not realize how much a particular sensation or activity has come to dominate our lives until we try to give it up. Jesus' response to the first temptation can be a reminder for us that we *do* have a choice when confronted by bodily desires. Not only can we *delay* our gratification, but we can use that delay as an opportunity to reflect on our deeper,

spiritual desires. As much as we need to listen to our bodies, we need to listen to our *hearts* even more.

In the second temptation, Jesus is invited to grasp at personal power and glory, without considering the cost. The devil wants him to think that worshipping Satan is a small price to pay to have other people bow down before *him* and constantly do *his* bidding. This is the lie that seduces many politicians, celebrities, star athletes, billionaires, and even clergy. The desire to be adored by others, to be put on a pedestal and admired for our success, our skills, our intelligence, our power, or any other gift that we may possess, is a very dangerous temptation. It can lead to egregious abuses of power and a false sense of superiority. Jesus counters this temptation by simply recalling the first commandment of the Law, that *God alone* is worthy of adoration. People in positions of power must always remember this fundamental truth. All of us should strive to be role models, but *none* of us should want to be anyone's *idol*.

The third temptation is quite different from the first two. It's not immediately obvious what desire would be satisfied by throwing oneself off the parapet of the Temple. This is not so much a temptation as a *dare*. The devil is daring Jesus to prove God's faithfulness by deliberately putting himself in grave danger and forcing God to save him. Jesus responds with the biblical teaching: "You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test." But, even without that nugget of wisdom from the Scriptures, it should be obvious to us that what the devil proposes is a really stupid idea. If we wish to verify God's faithfulness to us, the best way to do that is to listen to God's voice, follow in his way, and see how well that turns out for us. Then we can compare that outcome to the times when we have chosen to ignore God's will and go our own way instead. The Psalm quoted by the devil, suggesting that God's angels will protect his holy ones from harm, is proved when we *obey* the Lord's will, not when we *disobey* it. God's angels guard and support us by keeping us away from dangerous and foolish endeavors, not by rescuing us from the consequences of our bad decisions. Jesus shows us how to listen to and obey God's will, rather than trying to impose *our will* on God.

After Jesus successfully navigates his way through all three of these temptations, the devil finally relents. He realizes that he has employed his most effective weapons, the same deceptions which seem to work so well against the rest of humanity, yet he's come up empty. There's no point in digging any deeper into his bag of tricks, because the result will only be the same. However, the devil does not capitulate; rather, he bides his time. The story ends, somewhat ominously, by saying that the devil departed from Jesus "for a time." The battle was far from over. In order to conquer Satan once and for all, Jesus needed more than clever argumentation. He needed to hand over his life, in *total obedience to the Father's will*. That's how *we* win the victory over evil, too, by handing over *our* wills and *our* lives to the Lord. This Lenten season offers us an opportunity to examine where we are falling short, which temptations are getting the better of us, and how we can rise above them. Let us study Jesus and imitate his example of obedience, self-denial and faith.