

The First Sunday of Lent: Temptation and Hope

Father Bob's Homily – February 22, 2026

“The temptation story is a descent into the perils that beset mankind, because it lays bare the nature of every temptation: to push God aside because we perceive Him as secondary — if not actually superfluous — compared with all the apparently more urgent matters that fill our lives.”
— Pope Benedict XVI, Jesus of Nazareth

The temptation of Jesus in the desert is a descent into the perils that beset mankind. That Gospel represents for all human beings a descent into those same perils — the perils of temptation. Demonic temptation.

On this First Sunday of Lent, we hear clearly:
Be aware. You may be tempted.

Jesus was tempted.
We may be tempted.

The way these temptations unfold in today's Gospel exposes how the devil operates — his *modus operandi*.

First, he goes after the physicality of Jesus. He appeals to His physical hunger. Jesus has been fasting for forty days. He is hungry.

You might think, “What's the problem? He has the power to turn those stones into delicious bread.” But the problem is this: once you give in a little bit, he takes a lot — until there's nothing left.

Jesus knows this. He will not compromise His identity as the Son of God for a piece of bread.

And for us, this is about more than controlling our appetite for food. It is about our appetites in the spiritual life — our desires, what St. Thomas Aquinas calls the appetites. The things we want. The way we respond to the world around us. Our feelings.

From early childhood, we are taught to gain some control over this part of our humanity. It is one thing for a two-year-old to have a temper tantrum. It is another thing for an adult to have a temper tantrum.

This is Catholic Spirituality 101.

St. John of the Cross speaks of the “active night of the senses.” It is about understanding our humanity — the parts of us that are disordered — and learning, by grace, to reorder them so that they serve not only us, but God and others.

The devil then goes after the ego. He tempts our Lord with pride.

“If you are the Son of God... prove it.”

Pride can be very subtle. It can manifest itself as selfishness — which is really its root.

Self-recognition: “I’m better than you.”

Self-reliance: “I can do it myself.”

St. Teresa of Calcutta speaks of something she calls “inordinate zeal.” It sounds good — zeal! A desire to do something great for God. But even that can become disordered.

St. Ignatius of Loyola experienced something similar. On his way to Rome, filled with plans to do great things for God and the Church, he came to realize he could not put the world in order by himself. He had to do it in companionship with Jesus Christ — in a life of prayer — always keeping Jesus in the center.

That is a powerful reminder for us. Even our good intentions, even the good things we do for God and the Church, must be done in union with Christ. We cannot do it without Him.

May Jesus be our companion during these forty days — and beyond.

Finally, the devil tempts our Lord with possessions.

“I will give you all the kingdoms of the world.”

But Jesus does not fall for it, because His Kingdom is a spiritual Kingdom.

We must be careful about our relationship with possessions — money, power, influence. God may give us much. Why? So that we may be good stewards.

To use what we have not only for ourselves, but for others.
To give greater honor and glory to God.

It is not about how much we have or how little we have.
It is about how we use it.

Am I using what I have for the Gospel?

Holy Mother Church, in her wisdom, gives us this Gospel to remind us:

Jesus was tempted.
We will be tempted — in our humanity, in our egos, in our desires.

But we have hope.

Because of Jesus — His grace, and His example — we too have the power of hope.