

I Lent 2025

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

2 Cor. 6.1-10      St. Matthew 4.1-11



Anyone who has visited the Mojave Desert cannot help but be impressed by its awesome beauty. We head to deserts, or mountain retreats, to get away from the hustle and bustle of every day life. The Mojave Desert is indeed beautiful...but it can be unforgiving for those unprepared for a desert adventure...without a way out should they run into trouble...in a place where cell phones might not work.

The Gospel tells us after Jesus was baptized the Holy Spirit led him into the desert to be tested. Why did Jesus allow himself to be tempted by the Devil? Jesus is fully God...he cannot sin. Jesus is fully human. In his Letter to the Philippians, our friend, Saint Paul, says Jesus always had the nature of God. He freely took on our nature...he became a human being...the ultimate act of humility...and was tested just as we are tested.

Jesus spent 40 days and 40 nights in the desert fasting and praying. He needed to spend time alone to prepare for his public ministry. The number 40 appears several times in the Bible. It symbolizes trials, hardships, perseverance and new beginnings. For Jesus, this was a time of intense spiritual preparation and self-examination. He did not turn away from God during his time in the desert. He resisted evil, even when faced with extreme hardships and challenges. The number 40 also symbolizes the fulfillment of God's covenant-promises. God's covenants will be the focus of our Lenten Sunday Discussion Group this year.

Toward the end of his time in the desert, Jesus was hungry. The Devil tried to trick Jesus. First he challenges Jesus to prove he was the Son of God and change some rocks into bread. Jesus would never have violated the Natural Law God created. God's word is more powerful than bread. Score...Jesus -1-; Devil -0-.

Satan then took Jesus to the highest point of the Temple...God's House. He dared Jesus to jump...after all Psalm 91 says God will send his angels to keep Jesus from hurting his feet. Satan knows the Scriptures too. Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6.16 and tells Satan not to test the Lord your God. Score...Jesus -2-; Devil -0-.

There was one final test and it was the most enticing of them all. Satan promised Jesus all the world's kingdoms if he would just fall down and worship him. Jesus has had enough of Satan's games and tells him to go away...Scripture tells us to worship the Lord our God and serve only him. Score...Jesus -3-; Devil -0-.

Of course the time Jesus spent in the desert was not on a playing field with a scoreboard. Satan knew very well Jesus was the Son of God and he was not going to win him over. Satan tested Jesus when he was the most vulnerable...when he was hungry. We are most vulnerable to the Devil's attacks, especially during Lent, when we are fasting, praying, repenting and asking God to give us a clean heart and new and loyal spirit...all the things the Devil hates. We learn from Jesus how to resist the Devil's tricks and lies and tell him to go away.

Lent is our spiritual desert journey to the cross...the time we should be spending in self-examination and re-orientation of our hearts toward loving God and loving others. Saint Paul tells us we can expect to be tested just like everyone else on Planet Earth, but with the test there is always a way out. Our way out is to be honest with God and ourselves about our specific sins and shortcomings and ask him to help us sort things out. God really likes to forgive us and we must never allow ourselves to think we are beyond his help.

Dutch Roman Catholic priest Father Henri Nouwen wrote about sin and forgiveness...*"There is an awareness of sin that does not lead us to God but to self-preoccupation. Our temptation is to be so impressed by our sins and failings and so overwhelmed by our lack of generosity that we get stuck in a paralyzing guilt. It is a guilt that says: 'I am too sinful to deserve God's mercy.' It is the guilt that leads to introspection, instead of directing our eyes toward God. It is the guilt that has become an idol and therefore a form of pride."*

We can't deceive ourselves into thinking the Devil won't test us...that's another way he tries to fool us. He will take every opportunity to test us. We should remember our friend, Saint Paul, tells us to be courageous and remain firm in our faith.

Jesus himself is our way out when obstacles get in the way of our Lenten journey to the cross. By following his example, we can make this a holy and productive Lent.

✠