

I Lent 2026

Sermon-Saint Joseph Parish

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St. Matthew 4.1-11



Is temptation sin? We think of temptation as the desire to perform an action we may immediately enjoy, and probably later regret for various reasons. We are tempted to go against God's will; to break the ideal relationship we have with him. We may be tempted to coax, entice or manipulate another person into doing the same. But is temptation sin?

C.S. Lewis is widely regarded as the preeminent Anglican lay theologian and Christian apologist of the 20th Century. Lewis argued temptation is not sin, but a test of strength that builds character. In *Mere Christianity* he writes...

...“A silly idea is current that good people do not know what temptation means. This is obviously a lie. Only those who try to resist temptation know how strong it is. A man who gives in to temptation after five minutes simply does not know what it would have been like an hour later. That is why bad people, in one sense, know very little about badness. They have lived a sheltered life by always giving in. We never find out the strength of the evil impulses inside us until we try to fight it: and Christ, because He was the only man who never yielded to temptation, is also the only man who knows the full what temptation means—the only complete realist.”

Saint Paul is clear in his teachings we can all expect to be tested. Christians don't get a pass when it comes to the trials, tribulations, and suffering all human beings experience. However, in his First Letter to the Corinthians, Paul assures us God keeps his promise we will not be tested beyond our power to remain firm. When we find ourselves being tested, God will provide us with a way out. The “way out” doesn't necessarily mean the test will be removed. It means we will be given the strength to endure the test.

All three of the Synoptic Gospels record Jesus going in to the desert to fast and pray after he was baptized by his cousin John. People went in to the desert or up in to the mountains to get away from distractions of everyday life, and to be closer to God. They still do. Monasteries and retreat centers are often located far away from busy city lights and traffic.

The time Jesus spent in the desert tested his strength and endurance. Why did Jesus allow himself to be tested? It was to prove his humanity and show us the way to fight against Satan and our own temptations to seek instant gratification of the unhealthy and ultimately destructive kind. The author of Hebrews reminds us Jesus is the Great High Priest who has been tested in every way we are tested. He understands our strengths and weaknesses better than we understand them ourselves.

Jesus faced three very real tests...each more enticing than the previous test. The Devil knew very well Jesus was the Son of God...he wanted him to prove it. Jesus was hungry. The Devil told him to turn stones into bread. Jesus quoted a passage from Deuteronomy...bread is OK but won't really satisfy their hunger. What they really hunger for is God's word.

The Devil knows Scripture too...so he tries to get Jesus to jump from the highest point of the Temple in Jerusalem...further tempting Jesus by quoting Psalm 91 about angels coming to his aide so he won't get hurt. Jesus again quoted Deuteronomy...testing God is a waste of time! One final test. The Devil takes Jesus to a high mountain and offers him all the kingdoms of the world. All Jesus had to do was fall down and worship him. Jesus told the Devil to get lost.

The Devil seized the moment Jesus was the most vulnerable...when he was hungry and thirsty to try to trick him. He tries to do the same with us. He tries to trick us into thinking there is no way out of our trials and tribulations we encounter, or the messes we get ourselves in. He is a dangerous adversary and preys on our weakness...our self-pity...our sense of failure.

Lent is our spiritual journey through the desert along with Jesus...and the time we are most vulnerable. We will confront our own temptations and tests and the guilt that comes along with knowing we sometimes act against God's will.

When we find ourselves tested as we continue our Lenten journey to the cross...we learn from Jesus how to endure the tests and remain firm in our faith. We learn not to yield to the temptation. The way out **is** Jesus—the only complete realist!

