

**The Temptation of Jesus in the Desert  
(1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent, Year B)**

**Genesis 9:8-15—The Covenant with Noah**

1. “Covenant”: God makes an “everlasting covenant” with Noah and animals

**Psalms 25—God Blesses those who Keep His Covenant**

1. God is “good and upright,” and he “instructs sinners in the way” (v. 8)

**1 Peter 3:18-22—Christ and Days of Noah**

1. Descent: Christ “preached” to “the spirits in prison” (3:19)
2. Baptism: “*now saves you*” (3:21; important for catechumens to keep in mind)

**Mark 1:12-15—The Temptations of Jesus in the Desert**

1. The Spirit (Greek *to pneuma*): “*immediately* drove him out into the wilderness” (1:12)
2. Forty Days: “forty days” = time of testing and tribulation (1:13)
  - a. Noah: in the Ark for 40 Days of rain (Gen 7:4)
  - b. Israel: in the Desert for 40 Years (Num 14:33)
3. Temptation: Jesus is “tempted” by “Satan,” (Greek *satan*, meaning “adversary”)
4. Wild Beasts: Jesus was “with the wild beasts” (1:13) Why?

*Old Adam*

1. With “beasts” in Garden
2. Tempted by the Serpent
3. Fails the Test  
(Genesis 2:15-20; 3:1-7)

*New Adam (Jesus)*

1. With the “beasts” in the Desert
2. Tempted by Satan
3. Passes the Test  
(Mark 1:13-14)

5. Angels: Jewish Tradition: “ministering angels” served “Adam” (*b. Sanh. 59b*)
6. Jesus’ Message: “*repent, and believe in the gospel*” (1:15)

**The Living Tradition**

Pope Gregory the Great (6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century): Temptation is brought to fulfillment by three stages: suggestion, delight, and consent. And we in temptation generally fall through delight and then through consent, for being begotten of the sin of the flesh we bear within us that through which we suffer conflict. But God incarnate... came into the world without sin and so suffers no conflict within himself. He could therefore be tempted by suggestion, but the delight of sin could never touch his mind. So all these temptations of the devil are from without, not from within Him. (Gregory the Great, *Sermon 16*; trans. Oden and Hall, p. 17)

John Landsberg (16<sup>th</sup> century): From this episode our first lesson is that human life on earth is a life of warfare, and the first thing Christians must expect is to be tempted by the

devil. As Scripture tells us, we have to be prepared for temptation, for it is written: “When you enter God’s service, prepare your soul for an ordeal” (Sirach 2:1). For this reason the Lord desires the newly baptized and recent converts to find comfort in his own example. Reading in the gospel that Christ too was tempted by the devil immediately after he was baptized, they will not grown fainthearted and fearful if they experience keener temptations from the devil after their conversion than before... The second lesson Christ desires to impress upon us by his own example is that we should not lightly expose ourselves to temptation, for we read that it was the Holy Spirit who led Jesus into the wilderness. Mindful of our frailty rather, we must be on the watch, praying not to be put to the test, and keeping ourselves clear of every occasion to temptation. (John Justus Landsberg, *Complete Works* I, 120; trans. E. Barnecut, p. 30-31)

### Questions for Discussion and Reflection (1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Lent, Year B)

1. What is the significance of the “forty days” in Jesus’ time in the desert? What does it mean for the “forty days” of Lent?

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2. Why does Mark’s Gospel emphasize that Jesus was with “the wild beasts” and that “ministering angels” served him?

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3 Read the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* section on the Temptations of Jesus (see CCC 538-40). What lessons can we take away from the temptations of Jesus in the desert for our forty days of Lent?

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### For Further Study

1. Mary Healy. *The Gospel of Mark* (Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008).
2. Thomas C. Oden and Christopher A. Hall, *Mark* (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament II; Downers Grove: IVP, 1998), 16-17.
3. Edith Barnecut, O.S.B., *Journey with the Fathers: Commentaries on the Sunday Gospels, Year B* (Hyde Park: New City Press, 1993), 30-31.