

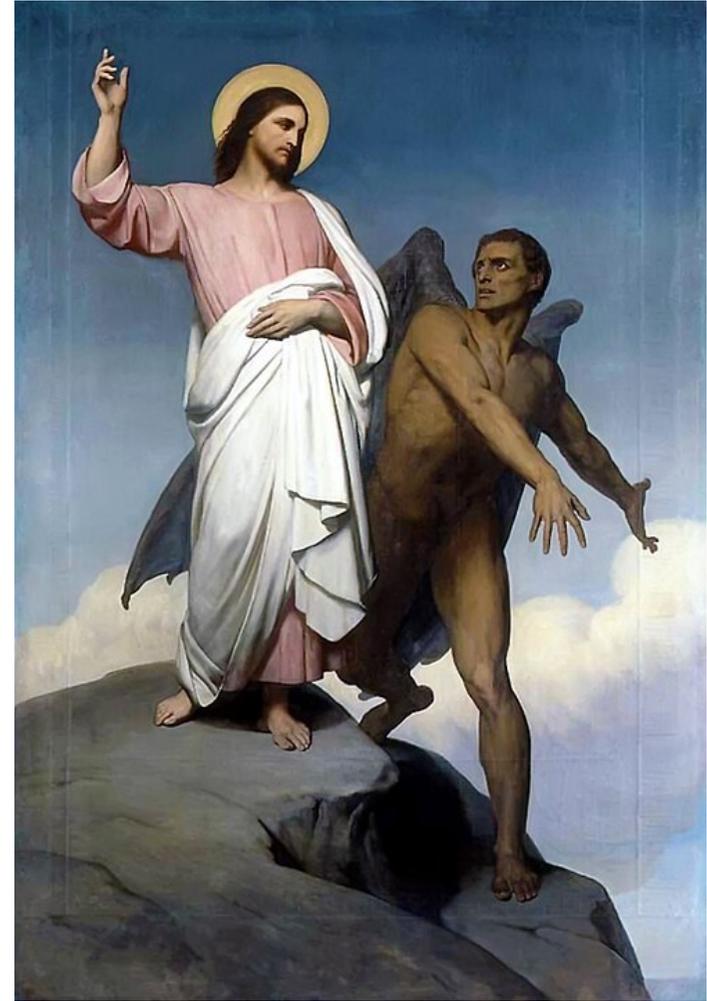
What are you giving up  
this year ...?



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or ...?

## ST BEUNO'S OUTREACH THE SEASON OF LENT 2026



Ary Scheffer, *The Temptation of Christ* (1854)

Including Prego Plus Background Notes  
for the First Sunday in Lent, Year A (Year of Matthew)

## THE SEASON OF LENT

The name for this season of the Church's year originally meant 'spring', deriving from the German root for 'long': Lent is the time of the year when the days become noticeably longer. The word came into use when sermons were first given in English, replacing the Latin *quadragesima* ('fortieth'): Lent lasts for forty days, which is a significant period in Scripture. This is the length of the flood in Genesis and of Moses's fast before he was given the Ten Commandments. More importantly, it is also the length of Jesus's stay in the desert before beginning his active ministry.

Lent is a **time of awakening**; an opportunity to 'start again'; a chance for renewal and re-commitment. Above all, it is a call to love in the way that Jesus loved the Father and each of us: continually, and through self-giving. It is good to remember that **Lent is a 'sober' but not a 'sombre' time** ('sombre' derives from the Latin *sub umbra* or 'under the shadows', meaning dismal and gloomy). Indeed, Lent can be a time of gladness when we focus on drawing nearer to God.

Traditional Lenten practices can assist us with this, and our **Works of Love** can take many forms. **Prayer, repentance and forgiveness**, sometimes through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, lie at the heart of our faith. **Fasting** can help us develop internal freedom. **Almsgiving** may prompt us not just to give money, but also time, support and friendship – and perhaps a listening ear to someone who needs it. All of these are well-tried ways in which we can co-operate with God.

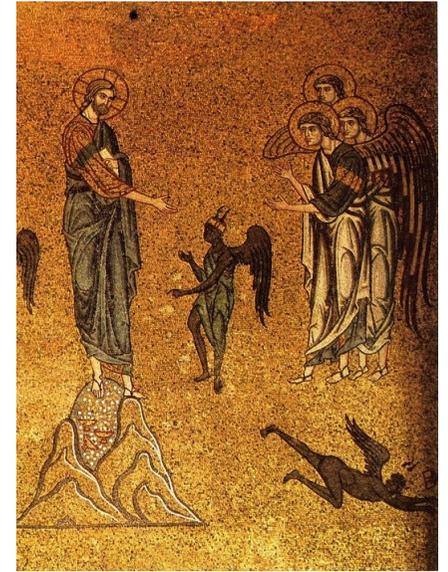
The season of Lent is also **a special time to let God come close to us and let his Holy Spirit work within us:**

- To help us examine the way in which we love;
- To touch our minds and hearts, and so help us live according to the values of Jesus himself;
- To reflect on Jesus's boundless love for us, shown particularly in his Passion, Death and Resurrection;
- To strengthen our resolve to change our focus, putting the interests of others rather than our own self first.

## The Third Temptation

No mountain exists which allows one to see all the kingdoms of the world. This could be a reference to Moses standing at the top of Mount Nebo (Deut. 34: 1–3).

Matthew had an ecclesial purpose in the telling of these temptations. He sought to explain to the first-century Church the kind of Messiah Jesus was. By implication, he also showed the kind of society the Church should be, and how it should overcome its own temptations.



*Images from the Temptation of Christ, a 12th-century mosaic in St Mark's Basilica, Venice (Wikimedia Commons)*

## On the pinnacle

'Temples and spires are good for looking down from;  
You stand above the world on holy heights,  
Here on the pinnacle, above the maelstrom,  
Among the few, the true, unearthly lights.  
Here you can breathe the thin air of perfection  
And feel your kinship with the lonely star,  
Above the shadow and the pale reflection,  
Here you can know for certain who you are.  
The world is stalled below, but you could move it  
If they could know you as you are up here,  
Of course they'll doubt, but here's your chance to prove it  
Angels will bear you up, so have no fear....'  
'I was not sent to look down from above,  
It's fear that sets these tests and proofs, not love.'

Malcolm Guite, *Sounding the Seasons*  
malcolmguite.wordpress.com

## The Second Temptation

The scene is now in Jerusalem, the Holy City, where Satan invites Jesus to give a convincing sign of his miraculous powers. (The 'Temple' itself is not identified; it could be Herod's temple overlooking the deep Kedron valley.)

This time the devil himself uses scripture, quoting Psalm 90 (91): 11–12. The reply Jesus gives: 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test' foreshadows the episode where the Pharisees and the Sadducees will test Jesus by asking him to show them a sign (Matthew 16: 1–4).



### All the kingdoms of the world

'So here's the deal and this is what you get:  
The penthouse suite with world-commanding views,  
The banker's bonus and the private jet,  
Control and ownership of all the news,  
An 'in' to that exclusive one percent,  
Who know the score, who really run the show,  
With interest on every penny lent  
And sweeteners for cronies in the know.  
A straight arrangement between me and you,  
No hell below or heaven high above,  
You just admit it, and give me my due  
And wake up from this foolish dream of love...'  
But Jesus laughed, 'You are not what you seem.  
Love is the waking life, you are the dream.'

Malcolm Guite, *Sounding the Seasons*  
malcolmguite.wordpress.com

## PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT —YEAR A

### Psalm 50 (51)

This is probably the best known of the seven Penitential Psalms, often referred to as the *Miserere*. Loved by many great Christian figures, including St Augustine, Gregory the Great and Martin Luther, it is particularly familiar from the musical setting by Gregorio Allegri (d. 1682), made for the use of the Sistine Chapel in Rome during Holy Week.

In line with the caption preceding the psalm, tradition sees in this text the confession and repentance of King David. David sent Uriah to his death in a battle against the Ammonites, having first taken Bathsheba (who later became his wife) as his mistress. The prophet Nathan subsequently confronts David and makes him realise what he has done. (A full account of events can be found in 2 Samuel: 11–12.)

The psalm is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on an awareness of our sins and so the desire to confess our guilt. This is seen very clearly in verses 1–2 where the penitent pleads for forgiveness through cleansing and purification. The psalmist entreats God to forgive him using a series of verbs: 'have mercy; wash me; cleanse me; create in me; do not cast me away; do not deprive me; open my lips' etc.



Over and above the psalmist's contrition, is his complete trust in the steadfast love, compassion and mercy of God for his people, and for the psalmist himself. He utters a heartfelt appeal for spiritual renewal: 'create a pure heart'; 'give me again the joy of your help'. In sin, he turned his back on God, but as a penitent he seeks renewed intimacy with God.

Although this psalm belongs to the group of individual lament psalms, it can also be read as coming from the whole community. Each person's sin has an effect on others, and each act of repentance makes a positive difference to the whole community: 'my mouth shall declare your praise'.

## Gospel Matthew 4: 1–11

The account of Jesus's temptations in the desert can be found in the Gospels of Matthew, Luke and Mark. Mark's account is very much shorter, while Matthew and Luke relate the temptations in a different order but probably drew on the same original source.

The episode of the temptations takes place just after Jesus's baptism when he has been affirmed as the Son of God: *This is my Son, the Beloved*.

### Being tempted

Scholars suggest it would be better to translate the Greek word by 'tested' rather than tempted. Temptations or tests are different from being coerced. Tempting someone is enticing them to want to do something. It does not take away free will. We can still *choose* to do right or wrong.



**The wilderness** into which Jesus was led was probably the Judean desert: a rocky, barren, scrubby, uninhabited place with a few points where water could be obtained. Some of the stones here are coated in soft lime, resembling loaves of bread.

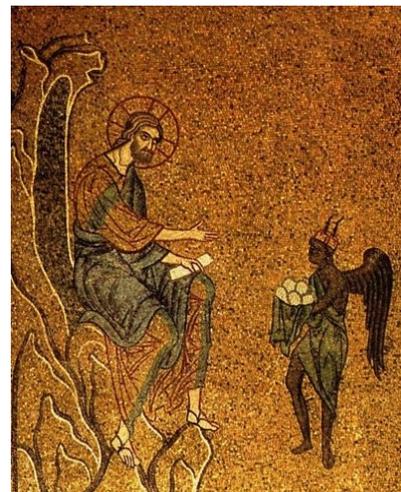
To this day, going into the desert is seen as venturing into a place of preparation; of learning to trust in God's mercy.

### Forty days and forty nights

As mentioned in the introduction (p. 2), forty is a very biblical number. It is associated with times of testing for the great figures of the Old Testament: Moses, Noah, Elijah, the Israelites. In Aramaic and Hebrew it meant more than a precise mathematical figure; it could also mean 'a very long time'.

The forty days of fasting preceding the temptations of Jesus have traditionally been associated with a cave on the 'mountain of temptation' (*Jebel Quruntul* in Palestinian Arabic) in the Judean desert, overlooking the town of Jericho.

## The First Temptation



This temptation for food (like the two temptations that follow) does not entice Jesus to do evil things. All three temptations rather encourage him to do good things, but for the wrong reasons or at the wrong time. *'If you are the Son of God ...'* A better translation might be *'since you are ...'*, since Jesus's divinity is not really questioned. Jesus's answer here is rooted in Scripture: he quotes from Deuteronomy (8: 3; 6: 16; and 6: 13), a favourite Old Testament book of the Early Church. Jesus is not denying the importance of food, but stresses that there is another dimension to life.

### Stones into bread

The Fountain thirsts, the Bread is hungry here  
The Light is dark, the Word without a voice.  
When darkness speaks it seems so light and clear.  
Now he must dare, with us, to make a choice.  
In a distended belly's cruel curve  
He feels the famine of the ones who lose,  
He starves for those whom we have forced to starve,  
He chooses now for those who cannot choose.  
He is the staff and sustenance of life,  
He lives for all from one Sustaining Word,  
His love still breaks and pierces like a knife  
The stony ground of hearts that never shared,  
God gives through Him what Satan never could;  
The broken bread that is our only food.

Malcolm Guite, *Sounding the Seasons: Seventy Sonnets for the Christian Year* (2012)  
malcolmguite.wordpress.com