

## THE SEASON OF LENT

The name for this season of the Church's year originally meant *spring*, deriving from the German root for *long*. This is the time of the year when the days become noticeably longer. The word has been in use since the later Middle Ages, replacing the Latin *quadragesima* ('fortieth') when sermons began to be given in English rather than Latin.

Lent lasts for forty days, a significant period in Scripture. This is the length of the flood in Genesis and the length of Moses's fast before being given the Ten Commandments; more importantly it is also the length of Jesus's stay in the desert before beginning his 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 Jesus loved the Father and each of us: continually, and through self-giving.

### Lent is a sober but not a sombre time



There are plenty of well-tried ways in which we can co-operate with God's Spirit at work within us, including practices such as:

- **fasting** – which helps internal freedom;
- **repentance** and forgiveness through the Sacrament of Reconciliation;
- **almsgiving**, perhaps not just giving money but also our time, our support and friendship, a listening ear, or other works of love.

### Lent is a special time to let God's 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 Jesus' values;
- 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; to put the interests of others rather than our own self first.

## PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT – YEAR C

### Second Reading Romans 10: 8–13

The letter of St Paul to the Romans, though placed first in the sequence of epistles of the New Testament, was not in fact the first letter Paul wrote. The Church in Rome included Jews and Gentiles. Scholars think Paul wrote it in 57–58 AD, probably in Corinth, on his way back from his third missionary journey in the East Mediterranean. It is unusual in that it was written to a church which Paul had not yet visited. Because he has not yet met them, Paul does not deal with specific problems of the church in Rome. This epistle has influenced Christian theology more than any other.

Today's extract is part of a larger argument about developing a close relationship with God by accepting Jesus Christ as Lord.

In the Old Testament, the requirement was to be totally obedient to the Law of Moses; but this was found to be all but impossible.

Now Paul argues that God's word—that is Christ, 'the word made flesh'— is very close to us, and if we have faith and believe in him in our heart and on our lips, we will be saved.

For this Paul quotes Moses in Deuteronomy 30: 14: *the Word is very near to you, it is in your mouth and in your heart for your observance*. Paul uses Scripture quotations to support his claim and to show his audience that he has not turned his back on his original heritage.

The expression *Jesus is Lord* which Paul uses several times in different epistles (Corinthians, Philippians) is a statement of faith of the early Palestinian churches. It is in Jesus that we best understand who God is.

Whereas in the Old Testament: *All who call on the name of the Lord* (Joel 3: 5) were pious, observant Israelites, in the New Testament, they are Christians, Greek or Jew.



## Gospel Luke 4: 1–13

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 Luke and Matthew do not relate the temptations in the same order but probably used the same original source.

Luke places his final temptation in Jerusalem. (Indeed, most of his Gospel shows Jesus's journey towards Jerusalem.) The temptations episode takes place just after Jesus's baptism when he has been affirmed as the Son of God: *This is my Son, the Beloved.*



### Filled with the Spirit, led by the Spirit

Luke is often called the evangelist of the Spirit. He refers to people being filled with the Spirit about a dozen times in his Gospel and in the Acts of the Apostles. The phrase always marks a period of great spiritual intensity (Acts 6: 5, 7: 55, 11: 24).

### Being tempted



Scholars suggest it would be better to translate the Greek word by 'tested' rather than tempted. Temptations or tests are different from coercion.

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

This is probably the desert of Judea, a rocky, barren, scrubby, uninhabited place with a few points where water could be obtained. Jebe Qarantal, a piece of land 35 by 15 miles west of Jericho, is traditionally thought to be the place where the temptations occurred.

### Forty days

As mentioned in the Introduction, 40 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 first temptation

This temptation for food and the other two temptations do not entice Jesus to do evil things; rather they 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 ...', for this fact is not really questioned.

*\* Turn this stone*

Contrary to Matthew, Luke uses the singular form here, making this temptation personal to Jesus, hungry after 40 days of fasting.

*\* Jesus's answer*

This is rooted in Scripture. He quotes from Deuteronomy (8: 3; 6: 16; and 6: 13), which seems to have been one of the favourite Old Testament books of the Early Church. See also Luke 10: 27 and Acts 3: 22. Jesus is not denying the importance of food, but stresses that there is another dimension to life.



### The second temptation

This is about using political power.

No mountain exists which allows one to see all the kingdoms of the world. It could be a reference to Moses standing at the top of Mount Nebo (Deuteronomy 34:1–3). The devil had a lot to say, but Jesus's answer is curt : only nine words in the original Greek.



### The third temptation

This involves giving convincing signs of his miraculous powers. This time the devil also uses Scripture (Psalm 91: 11–12). The scene is now in Jerusalem, the Holy City. The 'Temple' is not identified; it could be Herod's temple overlooking the deep Kedron valley.

### The devil left him to return at an appointed time

Although the devil retires, he will return during Jesus's Passion (Lk. 22: 3). All of these temptations are to do with power, with the kind of Messiah people were hoping Jesus might be. Every time, the choice is put to Jesus: to trust in God, his Father, or to promote his own self-interest.