

THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT

- Sun. **The First Sunday of Lent**
March 6 **TEACHINGS GIVEN IN CHRIST'S TEMPTATIONS**
 A reflection by Fr. Eugene La Verdere
- Mon. **Monday of the 1st Week of Lent**
7 **MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS FOR LENT 2022**
 Part 1
- Tues. **Tuesday of the 1st Week of Lent**
8 **MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS FOR LENT 2022**
 Part 2
- Wed. **Wednesday of the 1st Week of Lent**
9 **MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS FOR LENT 2022**
 Part 3
- Thurs. **Thursday of the 1st Week of Lent**
10 **WHAT ARE WE TO OFFER TO OUR GOD?**
 From the Treatise Against Heresies by St. Irenaeus
- MONASTIC DESERT DAY**
- Fri. **Friday of the 1st Week of Lent**
11 **REPENTANCE IS PRAYER**
 A reflection from a letter of St. Maximus the Confessor
- Sat. **Saturday of the 1st Week of Lent**
12 **BEARING THE CROSS DAILY**
 A reflection from a sermon by St. Augustine

Sunday

THE TEACHINGS GIVEN IN CHRIST'S TEMPTATIONS

A reflection by Fr. Eugene La Verdiere

By his first temptation, Jesus teaches us to reject every view that sees his divine sonship as somehow canceling out the practical reality of his humanity. Jesus is the Son of God but is also fully human. His mission was to embrace humanity and not to escape any of the limitations that go with being human.

By his second temptation, Jesus teaches us that his mission is not political. He does have a special mission as messiah, but it consists in an act of worship. That is, He shows us complete surrender to God as the only One in whom we can trust totally. If he had sought to save people by political power, he would have conducted his ministry in a quite different way. He would not have placed the total gift of self at the center of all he did and said. This gift is completed and fulfilled in his passion and death. Had he sought salvation by political power, he would have been subjecting himself to illusory Satanic power.

By his third temptation, Jesus rejected the view that being a child of God entails special human protection. Any effort to circumvent human limitations would be denying total dependence on God. That would have betrayed the Heavenly Father's intention for human life. Jesus did not expect God to save him from death. He gives his life to God.

Jesus' response to temptation shows the Christian community how it should respond to its temptations. In the context of Luke's writing, for instance, temptations have arisen in regard to sharing food in table fellowship, political relationships with the powerful, and dealing with persecution.

Christians, then, mustn't expect to be nourished just because they are Christian. All must learn to situate their needs for food, and for all the other physical needs of life, in the context of active mutual helpfulness. Christians have to bear the political difficulties that are normal for human beings and the same holds for their dealing with persecution in whatever form. We can't counter political power with political power without betraying ourselves into the hands of The Enemy or engaging in behaviors that only God can make effective.

Note too that the context in which the temptations take place is also significant. Notice that (e.g.) Luke placed them right after he declares Jesus' genealogy. This is a way of emphasizing Jesus' humanity. God has sent his messiah after Israel has been through a long history of failed efforts to save itself by human means. We have to understand Jesus in terms of this history. The genealogy shows that Adam was already a child of God but a failed one because he sought help elsewhere than in God. That was because he didn't like the indirect way God gives most help. The temptations show how a child of Adam can be a child of God without expecting God to take away human struggles.

Jesus' mission is humanity's complete victory over evil but by accepting its limitations as not an obstacle to being a child of God. Jesus accepted them completely. He shows us how God intends to triumph over evil and that God will do everything—e.g., raising Jesus from the dead—but do it through our working with Him. We accept our limitations as a way of becoming one with God.

Monday

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS FOR LENT 2022, Part 1

“Let us not grow tired of doing good, for in due time we shall reap our harvest, if we do not give up. So then, while we have the opportunity, let us do good to all” (Gal 6:9-10)

Lent is a favorable time for personal and community renewal, as it leads us to the paschal mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. For our Lenten journey in 2022, we will do well to reflect on Saint Paul’s exhortation to the Galatians: “Let us not grow tired of doing good, for in due time we shall reap our harvest, if we do not give up. So then, while we have the opportunity (*kairós*), let us do good to all” (Gal 6:9-10).

1. Sowing and reaping

In these words, the Apostle evokes the image of sowing and reaping, so dear to Jesus (*cf. Mt 13*). Saint Paul speaks to us of a *kairós*: an opportune time for sowing goodness in view of a future harvest. What is this “opportune time” for us? Lent is certainly such an opportune time, but so is our entire existence, of which Lent is in some way an image. All too often in our lives, greed, pride and the desire to possess, accumulate and consume have the upper hand, as we see from the story of the foolish man in the Gospel parable, who thought his life was safe and secure because of the abundant grain and goods he had stored in his barns (*cf. Lk 12:16-21*). Lent invites us to conversion, to a change in mindset, so that life’s truth and beauty may be found not so much in possessing as in giving, not so much in accumulating as in sowing and sharing goodness.

The first to sow is God himself, who with great generosity “continues to sow abundant seeds of goodness in our human family” (*Fratelli Tutti*, 54). During Lent, we are called to respond to God’s gift by accepting his word, which is “living and active” (*Heb 4:12*). Regular listening to the word of God makes us open and docile to his working (*cf. Jas 1:21*) and bears fruit in our lives. This brings us great joy, yet even more, it summons us to become God’s co-workers (*cf. 1 Cor 3:9*). By making good use of the present time (*cf. Eph 5:16*), we too can sow seeds of goodness. This call to sow goodness should not be seen as a burden but a grace, whereby the Creator wishes us to be actively united with his own bountiful goodness.

What about the harvest? Do we not sow seeds in order to reap a harvest? Of course! Saint Paul points to the close relationship between sowing and reaping when he says: “Anyone who sows sparsely will reap sparsely as well, and anyone who sows generously will reap generously as well” (2 Cor 9:6). But what kind of harvest are we talking about? A first fruit of the goodness we sow appears in ourselves and our daily lives, even in our little acts of kindness. In God, no act of love, no matter how small, and no “generous effort” will ever be lost (*cf. Evangelii Gaudium*, 279). Just as we recognize a tree by its fruits (*cf. Mt 7:16, 20*), so a life full of good deeds radiates light (*cf. Mt 5:14-16*) and carries the fragrance of Christ to the world (*cf. 2 Cor 2:15*). Serving God in freedom from sin brings forth fruits of sanctification for the salvation of all (*cf. Rom 6:22*).

In truth, we see only a small portion of the fruits of what we sow, since, according to the Gospel proverb, “one sows, while another reaps” (*Jn 4:37*). When we sow for the benefit of others, we share in God’s own benevolent love: “it is truly noble to place our hope in the hidden power of the seeds of goodness we sow, and thus to initiate processes whose fruits will be reaped by others” (*Fratelli Tutti*, 196). Sowing goodness for the benefit of others frees us from narrow self-interest, infuses our actions with gratuitousness, and makes us part of the magnificent horizon of God’s benevolent plan.

Tuesday

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS FOR LENT 2022, *Part 2*

The word of God broadens and elevates our vision: it tells us that the real harvest is eschatological, the harvest of the last, undying day. The mature fruit of our lives and actions is “fruit for eternal life” (*Jn* 4:36), our “treasure in heaven” (*Lk* 12:33; 18:22). Jesus himself uses the image of the seed that dies in the ground in order to bear fruit as a symbol of the mystery of his death and resurrection (cf. *Jn* 12:24); while Saint Paul uses the same image to speak of the resurrection of our bodies: “What is sown is perishable, but what is raised is imperishable; what is sown is contemptible but what is raised is glorious; what is sown is weak, but what is raised is powerful; what is sown is a natural body, and what is raised is a spiritual body” (*1 Cor* 15:42-44). The hope of resurrection is the great light that the risen Christ brings to the world, for “if our hope in Christ has been for this life only, we are of all people the most pitiable. In fact, however, Christ has been raised from the dead, as the first-fruits of all who have fallen asleep” (*1 Cor* 15:19-20). Those who are intimately united to him in love “by dying a death like his” (*Rom* 6:5) will also be united to his resurrection for eternal life (cf. *Jn* 5:29). “Then the upright will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (*Mt* 13:43).

2. “Let us not grow tired of doing good”

Christ’s resurrection enlivens earthly hopes with the “great hope” of eternal life, planting the seed of salvation in our present time (cf. BENEDICT XVI, *Spe Salvi*, 3; 7). Bitter disappointment at shattered dreams, deep concern for the challenges ahead and discouragement at the poverty of our resources, can make us tempted to seek refuge in self-centredness and indifference to the suffering of others. Indeed, even our best resources have their limitations: “Youths grow tired and weary, the young stumble and fall” (*Is* 40:30). Yet God “gives strength to the weary, he strengthens the powerless... Those who hope in the Lord will regain their strength, they will soar on wings like eagles; though they run they will not grow weary, though they walk they will never tire» (*Is* 40:29, 31). The Lenten season calls us to place our faith and hope in the Lord (cf. *1 Pet* 1:21), since only if we fix our gaze on the risen Christ (cf. *Heb* 12:2) will we be able to respond to the Apostle’s appeal, “Let us never grow tired of doing good” (*Gal* 6:9).

Let us not grow tired of praying. Jesus taught us to “pray always without becoming weary” (*Lk* 18:1). We need to pray because we need God. Thinking that we need nothing other than ourselves is a dangerous illusion. If the pandemic has heightened the awareness of our own personal and social fragility, may this Lent allow us to experience the consolation provided by faith in God, without whom we cannot stand firm (cf. *Is* 7:9). No one attains salvation alone, since we are all in the same boat, amid the storms of history; [2] and certainly no one reaches salvation without God, for only the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ triumphs over the dark waters of death. Faith does not spare us life’s burdens and tribulations, but it does allow us to face them in union with God in Christ, with the great hope that does not disappoint, whose pledge is the love that God has poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (cf. *Rom* 5:1-5).

Wednesday

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS FOR LENT 2022, *Part 3*

Let us not grow tired of uprooting evil from our lives. May the corporal fasting to which Lent calls us to fortify our spirit for the battle against sin. *Let us not grow tired of asking for forgiveness in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation*, knowing that God never tires of forgiving. *Let us not grow tired of fighting against concupiscence*, that weakness which induces to selfishness and all evil, and finds in the course of history a variety of ways to lure men and women into sin (cf. *Fratelli Tutti*, 166). One of these is addiction to the digital media, which impoverishes human relationships. Lent is a propitious time to resist these temptations and to cultivate instead a more integral form of human communication (*ibid.*, 43) made up of “authentic encounters” (*ibid.*, 50), face-to-face and in person.

Let us not grow tired of doing good in active charity towards our neighbors. During this Lent, may we practice almsgiving by giving joyfully (cf. *2 Cor 9:7*). God who “supplies seed to the sower and bread for food” (*2 Cor 9:10*) enables each of us not only to have food to eat, but also to be generous in doing good to others. While it is true that we have our entire life to sow goodness, let us take special advantage of this Lenten season to care for those close to us and to reach out to our brothers and sisters who lie wounded along the path of life (cf. *Lk 10:25-37*). Lent is a favorable time to seek out – and not to avoid – those in need; to reach out – and not to ignore – those who need a sympathetic ear and a good word; to visit – and not to abandon – those who are lonely. Let us put into practice our call to do good to all, and take time to love the poor and needy, those abandoned and rejected, those discriminated against and marginalized (cf. *Fratelli Tutti*, 193).

3. “If we do not give up, we shall reap our harvest in due time”

Each year during Lent we are reminded that “goodness, together with love, justice and solidarity, are not achieved once and for all; they have to be realized each day” (*ibid.*, 11). Let us ask God to give us the patient perseverance of the farmer (cf. *Jas 5:7*), and to persevere in doing good, one step at a time. If we fall, let us stretch out our hand to the Father, who always lifts us up. If we are lost, if we are misled by the enticements of the evil one, let us not hesitate to return to God, who “is generous in forgiving” (*Is 55:7*). In this season of conversion, sustained by God’s grace and by the communion of the Church, let us not grow tired of doing good. The soil is prepared by fasting, watered by prayer and enriched by charity. Let us believe firmly that “if we do not give up, we shall reap our harvest in due time” and that, with the gift of perseverance, we shall obtain what was promised (cf. *Heb 10:36*), for our salvation and the salvation of others (cf. *1 Tim 4:16*). By cultivating fraternal love towards everyone, we are united to Christ, who gave his life for our sake (cf. *2 Cor 5:14-15*), and we are granted a foretaste of the joy of the kingdom of heaven, when God will be “all in all” (*1 Cor 15:28*).

May the Virgin Mary, who bore the Saviour in her womb and “pondered all these things in her heart” (*Lk 2:19*), obtain for us the gift of patience. May she accompany us with her maternal presence, so that this season of conversion may bring forth fruits of eternal salvation.

Thursday

WHAT ARE WE TO OFFER TO OUR GOD?

A reflection from the Treatise Against Heresies by St. Irenaeus

God regards the Church's offering as a pure and acceptable sacrifice. He has said that it is to be offered all over the world. Of course, God has no need for a sacrifice offered by us. Rather, it is an honor for those who offer it to have God accept it. We show reverence and love for the creator of all things by our gift. The Lord wishes us to offer it in all simplicity and innocence. Listen to the words of Scripture: *"If you remember when you are offering your gift at the altar that a brother or sister has some grievance against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar while you go and make peace. Then come back and offer it."* This is our duty if we want to offer a right sacrifice to our God.

We also have a duty, Scripture says, to offer God the "first fruits" of his creation. Moses noted this and warned us not to come empty-handed into the presence of the Lord, Our God. This means that we thank God by offering the very gifts that God has given us. We have nothing else to offer. So, we are honored by God for offering God's very gifts to us.

Sometimes people speak as though the offering of sacrifice had ended. This is not true. Yes, in former ages, sacrifice was offered by the People of Israel and that is no longer so. But sacrifice is still offered by the Church. Yet the nature of the offering has changed. Formerly, it was made by those who were in effect slaves, and now it is offered by free men and women. One and the same Lord, however, receives the sacrifices so we have to ask what the difference for God is between a slave's sacrifice and that of a free person. The difference is that a free person's sacrifice manifests giving oneself to God freely!

Reflect on the fact that in God's eyes there is nothing without significance and importance. Formerly, for instance, people offered tithes to God. But now that people are free, they can offer themselves. Rather than offering things people now are invited to offer all they have so it may be used in manifesting the Lord's love, as in care for the needy. In a sense, people are offering what is of lesser value because they can look forward in hope to receiving something of far greater worth. What we do reminds us of the tale of the poor widow who gave to God all she had to live on.

We are, indeed, bound to offer sacrifices to God. We should always show to God gratitude for creating us. We do this first by offering the first fruits of creation and doing it with a pure intention, a genuine faith, a firm hope, and a heartfelt love. In making such an offering we proclaim the communion and unity of all humankind in the Spirit. Earthly bread is no longer ordinary after the invocation of the Holy Spirit; it has become the Eucharist. Our bodies too, after we have received the eucharist, we are no longer the same; fear of death has been replaced by sure hope for resurrection. When we offer ourselves to God what we do is offer an eternal sacrifice because we live forever. If we have become Christ then it is our task to love as God does—forever. That is a perfect sacrifice, springing from Christ's sacrifice in his death and resurrection.

Friday

REPENTANCE IS PRAYER

A reflection from a Letter by St. Maximus the Confessor

God's will is to save us. Nothing pleases God more than our coming back to him in genuine repentance. To repent is to "turn-to" God. If one prays to God intentionally then one is surrendering oneself to God; that is what we do in prayer. Prayer is a way of "turning-to" God and "turning-to" God is what prayer is. To repent and to pray are two ways of doing the same deed of trusting love.

The heralds of truth and the ministers of divine grace have told us this from the beginning, repeating it again and again. God's longing for our salvation is the primary and preeminent sign of divine goodness and love. It was precisely to show us this that the Word of God lived among us in the flesh and did and suffered all that was needed in order to reveal this truth to us.

The Lord healed our physical infirmities. He freed us from our sins. He suffered and died to take upon himself all the consequences of our wrongs. He taught us in many different ways how to imitate him, and so become like our Heavenly Father. He told us to show the same kindness and genuine love for others that set him apart as special. In all these ways he proclaimed that he had come to call sinners—for all have sinned and need to turn back to God. It was not the healthy who needed a doctor but the sick.

You have heard him declare that he came to look for lost sheep and to heal those who were sick. Using the likeness of a woman's search for a lost coin, he taught us that he came to restore the lost image of the Heavenly Father that had been imprinted in us at our creation. To make this point he told the tale of the man who fell into the hands of robbers and was left half-dead. He took him to an inn where he could be cared for and left money to pay for the care.

Meditate continuously on the words: "*You can be sure that there is joy in heaven over one sinner who repents*". The Lord shows us the Heavenly Father's love using the story of the son who left home to become a profligate, and only turned back when he couldn't care for himself. What will one who loves like this God do for us sinners? What could God have done for his turned-away son that he didn't do, and do gladly? What would this loving God refuse to do for us when we turn-to Him in prayer, and whatever other form of repentance we select?

Think of the story of the one hundred stay-at-home sheep and the one who got lost. When God finds us wandering and alone, he doesn't sit us down for a good talking to, nor correct us in any of the ordinary ways. God simply picks us up and brings us to safety. The deed is that of Jesus who cried out: "*Come to me all you who toil and are heavy of heart!*" He told us that if we accept his yoke, we will find that it is no great burden but something light. He is talking about the entire way of life that he gives us in the Gospels.

Once we understand how great God's love for each of us is, we understand why he asks us to become like the Heavenly Father. "*Forgive and you will be forgiven; treat other people as you would wish them to treat you*". If we only turn to God, we will begin to experience mercy and kindness and love, and in a wonderful way that we probably never imagined. *That is what we do during the Lenten season. How wonderful it is to turn-to God!*

Saturday

BEARING THE CROSS DAILY

A reflection from a sermon by St. Augustine

Our Lenten observances always begin with a call to conversion. Indeed, those who would help and care for others in a way that leads to real life, are responsible for doing this. If you want to genuinely nourish others, within as well as without, there isn't a better way than sharing with them to call to follow Christ. If we are going to let go of some of the things we rely on to make our lives pleasant, then we need spiritual strength, and we give that to one another when we repeat what we believe about God and his Son, Jesus Christ.

We are soon going to celebrate the passion of our crucified Lord. He has called us to take up our own cross daily and follow Him to Calvary. This certainly makes sense when we pause to reflect on the commitment we have made to Christ. What's more, the sort of crucifixion we have to endure is very unlikely to be harder than restraining our desires for what makes life comfortable. This is a cross we will have to take up daily if we want to become more like Christ—just as the Heavenly Father wants us to do.

Our entire life is filled with different sorts of trials, and there are temptations too. Think of the fact you are sharing crucifixion with Christ and think of this realistically. There are also the demands of justice and the call to become holy as the Heavenly Father is. What gets in the way of all this except exaggerated worry about the wants and needs of our fleshly nature? That is what St. Paul had in mind when he exhorted us to let our hands and feet be pierced by the nails that spilled Christ's blood. He was appealing to us by God's mercy to let ourselves become living sacrifices to God, holy and acceptable as only Christ can make us.

To hang on such a cross doesn't bring shame, especially to those who are servants of God. Rather, this is something in which such people glory. *"Far be it from me to glory in anything but the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world has been crucified to me and I to the world"*. That is St. Paul.

A crucifixion like this is something that ought to continue throughout one's entire life. It is not something that should fill only 40 of the days of each year. Recall that Moses and Elijah, and Our Lord himself, fasted for forty days. We are meant to see in them symbols of the Law, the Prophets and the Gospel. We are to learn from them not to cling to the life we know now, or to imitate the ways of those who have no other hope than a worldly one. We are to nail everything that is unregenerate in us to the Cross.

It is characteristic of dedicated Christians to live this way always. They never want to come down from this cross until they are taken into God's Kingdom. If we don't live in this way, we will end up sinking into what are called "worldly ways". If, then, the Cross is to epitomize the Christian way of living it can't be simply something for forty days, or do you want to imitate Christ for only this short time? In fact, carrying this sort of Cross is a path to renewal and transformation and joy. We can always rejoice in the Lord. He has found us and drawn us into a Heavenly way of life more blessed than any other.