

Journeying Together

First Week of Lent: Facing Temptations



Welcome everyone and spend a few minutes inviting people to give their names and, if appropriate, which parish or group they have come from.

We have offered a rough idea of timing in the overall Leaders' guidelines – but you may find people are ready to move on more quickly – or would welcome a few more minutes on a particular section... work with what the group feels most comfortable with but ensure that your meeting ends promptly for those on buses or with babysitters.

OPENING RESPONSES

Reader: We gather in the name of the Father

**All: Who took the risk of creating humanity –
not as mindless robots
but as men and women and children
blessed with free wills
and the knowledge and capacity to choose between good and evil.**

Reader: We gather in the name of the Son

**All: Who took on the fullness of humanity
and found himself facing temptation as every human being does –
but showing his disciples and friends
the way to face it and to overcome it.**

Reader: We gather in the name of the Holy Spirit

**All: Who speaks to our hearts and minds
and prompts our choices for good
and strengthens and teaches us
how to avoid choices for ill.**

Reader: We gather...

**All: (making the Sign of the Cross) in the name of the Father
and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen**

GOSPEL READING – Mark 1: 12-15

Use these or your own words.

Please listen as the – very short! – Gospel is read. It can help to close your eyes—or look at the person reading—or the images on the screen – choose whichever suits you best.

(After Jesus' baptism), the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'

PERSONAL TIME WITH THE GOSPEL

Here we have two things happening. We have Jesus going into the wilderness and facing temptation – and then we have him coming back and taking up the message of John the Baptist – calling people to repent, that is, to turn away from choices that lead them away from God and to refocus their lives on goodness and truth and all that will give them life.

For a few moments, reflect quietly on some questions. They do not have a right or wrong answer but are designed to help us to go more deeply into the Word of God.

- How do you think Jesus' time alone in the wilderness prepared him for working with disciples and crowds and individuals in his public ministry?
- Why do you think the Holy Spirit led Jesus out to face temptation and did not just reassure him that he was the Son of God and encourage him to get on with his ministry?

GROUP REFLECTION

In the Gospel we hear on the First Sunday, we do not get that word "immediately" – it simply says that Jesus was driven into the desert by the Holy Spirit. We have included it to help to give a context for what is happening. Jesus has just been baptised and "immediately", the Spirit sends him out into the wilderness. It is almost as if the Spirit is giving Jesus the experience all believers have – no sooner do you decide you want to do better than temptation to turn away from that gets stronger!

Mark does not tell us what the temptations were – for him it seems most important that Jesus faced them on his own and came back from them stronger and more prepared for the ministry that God had laid before him.

Here are some questions to get us reflecting a bit more deeply. There are no right or wrong answers – they are just prompts to help us to think about what is happening in the Gospel and to come to understand Jesus and his ministry that bit more.

- Why was it important that Jesus faced those temptations alone?
- How did the time in the wilderness help to strengthen Jesus – and prepare him for working with all the different people who would come his way during his ministry?
- What might have helped Jesus to be sure that the time was now right to take up his mission?

Depending on the size of the group, you might invite people to share any thoughts from their group discussion.

LISTENING TOGETHER

What happens in this Gospel helps us to learn how to “get real” about temptation in our own lives. Here are some thoughts to ponder – as you listen to them, make a note of which one strikes you as particularly challenging or helpful:

- It is the Holy Spirit who leads Jesus out into the wilderness to face temptation. Why?
- Jesus does not run away from temptation – or pretend it isn’t happening – he faces it down.
- Jesus does not blame the Spirit – or anyone else for his temptations.
- Facing up to temptations in his own life (even as the Son of God) helped Jesus to understand what it is like for every man, woman and child in the human race.
- Knowing the reality of temptation to turn away from God, Jesus called people to repent – to turn away from those choices and to make positive choices for God.
- Taking time out on his own in the wilderness gave Jesus the space and time to take a long look at himself – his temptations – and God’s call for his life.
- Taking time out on his own in the wilderness and during his public ministry helped Jesus to give quality time and attention to other people.

Give time for people to read through the thoughts and to gather their own reflections. Depending on the size of your group, you might do this as one group or divide people into threes or fours. If you can, have a tooth-brushing sand-timer (runs for 2 minutes) or an egg-timer (runs for around 3). Invite people to share anything from the Gospel reflection or ‘Listening Together’ thoughts that has struck them. If you have timers, tell them that when they wish to take their turn, they turn it over and that this is their time to talk uninterrupted. You may need to remind people politely that they are not to interrupt but to really listen to the person speaking. Any discussion can come at the end – the important thing is to give this sacred time and space for someone to share their insights. Please also say that what is shared in these groups is confidential – this is Holy Ground. Sometimes, very quiet music in the background can help to keep the atmosphere reflective and relaxed.

People might like to share on:

- What struck me about Jesus’ experience that I’ve never noticed before?
- Which thought about what Jesus learned challenged or helped me most?

REFLECTION AND ACTION POINT FOR THE WEEK

Lent is called a penitential season. For some people, this can feel negative – which of us wants to dwell on our failings and weakness? If it just serves to make us miserable then they have a good point! However, if we think about what happened with Jesus, the very opposite can happen. By acknowledging the reality of temptation in our lives, we can learn more about depending on the Holy Spirit for strength and guidance. We can learn that God loves us unconditionally. This does not give us permission to deliberately choose to sin – in fact, knowing that love can make us want to try harder – in the words of the song, “to pick ourselves up – dust ourselves off – and start all over again!”

This Lent, you are invited to keep a journal – a kind of accompaniment to your reflections. Each week, we will offer a few thoughts to get you started. This part is entirely private and to do as and when suits you – at home, perhaps or during a time of reflection with the Blessed Sacrament. As you go along, you may find that things keep cropping up and that you would like to talk to someone in confidence – this could be a priest in the sacrament of Reconciliation or, perhaps, a trained spiritual listener. Let us know if we can help in this – it will be entirely confidential.

(Note to leader: If anyone in the group would like a listener to speak to, contact the Department for Spirituality and we will put them in touch with someone. This is a confidential service.)

Spend some time in personal reflection on the thoughts below. Try not to judge yourself but be honest and humble in just being human.

- What are my “favourite” temptations – the things that just won’t go away?
- How do I react to temptations? Running away? Denying I have them? Being ashamed of admitting them? Feel guilty of having them? Fighting – fighting – fighting – but convinced I will lose in the end?

For next week – choose something from your reflections that is manageable – maybe even a little amusing – to share with your group. Remember this will be in complete confidence but do not use it for a deep or difficult conversation.

CLOSING PRAYER

The psalms are real prayers. They have stood the test of time because they speak to the reality of human life. Here is the psalm for this Sunday. We will use it today but also think about using it during your own prayer and journal times during the week.

All: Your ways, Lord, are faithfulness and love for those who keep your covenant.

Reader: Lord, make me know your ways.
Lord, teach me your paths.
Make me walk in your truth, and teach me:
for you are God my saviour.

All: Your ways, Lord, are faithfulness and love for those who keep your covenant.

Reader: Remember your mercy, Lord,
and the love you have shown from of old.
In your love remember me.
because of your goodness, O Lord.

All: Your ways, Lord, are faithfulness and love for those who keep your covenant.

Reader: The Lord is good and upright.
He shows the path to those who stray,
He guides the humble in the right path,
He teaches his way to the poor.

All: Your ways, Lord, are faithfulness and love for those who keep your covenant.

Amen.