

# The First Sunday in Lent (Year A)

Let Faith Arise – even in tough times of temptation!

Read Matthew 4:1-11

The description of the temptation of Jesus began with God's Spirit leading Jesus from his baptism to a time of testing by the devil. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke all mention the Spirit's role in leading Jesus into the wilderness, while the Gospel of John does not include a record of the temptation at all. The Spirit does not protect or hide Jesus from a confrontation with the devil, but nor does the Spirit abandon him.

**1. How do you understand the role of God's Spirit in the temptation of Jesus?**

**2. How can this time in the wilderness be a gift for Jesus?**

During his time in the wilderness, Jesus practiced the spiritual discipline of fasting – abstaining from eating food. Some fasts lasted only from sunrise to sunset, but in Matthew's Gospel the fast of Jesus lasted day and night. Thus, by the end of that fast, Jesus was famished.

**3. Imagine what it feels like to be famished. Describe.**

**4. How easy is it for dieters to resist the temptations of sweets when they are famished?**

**5. How clearly do you think when you are famished?**

It was the devil who came to tempt Jesus with basic human desires: food, power, and prestige. Jesus was confronted with the limits of his own humanity. When his hunger, loneliness, and human weakness was overwhelming, Jesus turned to God's Word again and again. "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." (Matthew 4:4 NRSV)

**6. How does a Christian "not live by bread alone"?**

The second test appeared to be a test for Jesus, but in reality, it was also a test for God. Jump off a cliff and see if God will catch you! Does God really care? If so, let God prove it. But Jesus countered, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test." (Matthew 4:7 NRSV)

**7. What are some ways that people try to test God?**

**8. Why are we instructed not to test God?**

The third test was about worship. It seemed strange for the devil to offer Jesus all the kingdoms of the world if Jesus worshiped him. What right did the devil have to give "the kingdoms of the world" away?

Again, Jesus countered with scripture: “Worship the Lord your God and serve only him.” (Matthew 4:10 NRSV)

**9. Which temptation would have been the most difficult for you to resist?**

**10. How does the devil tempt you today?**

The Spirit lead Jesus into the wilderness for a time of temptation. During those forty days, God shaped Jesus so he would be focused on God’s Word and filled with the Spirit.

In like fashion, it will be the Spirit who leads God’s people into the forty days of Lent. Hopefully, as disciples of Christ, we are willing to be shaped by God to become God’s agents of peace and love. Lent is a time to re-order our lives, to examine priorities, and to be open to God shaping our lives. It can be a time to “live in the wilderness” as we are challenged and renewed by the Spirit. The Christian church has many examples of people who were challenged to re-order their lives. One such example is the life of St. Francis of Assisi.

St Francis was born in 1181 or 1182 in Assisi, Italy to a wealthy family and he died October 3, 1226. He grew up with all the comforts of life and pursued a military career until he became very ill. While St. Francis was recovering, he began to experience a conversion process steeped in prayer. For him, it was a wilderness time of struggle and discernment. He discovered God’s call to leave the comforts of his personal life - and commit to rebuilding the church.

Like Jesus, his life was shaped by God’s Word, particularly Matthew 10:7-13. This passage served as a foundation for his life choices of poverty, love, and service to Jesus Christ.

**11. Take a moment to read Matthew 10:7-13. What is its message?**

**12. What does it mean to be “converted” and let faith arise?**

St. Francis understood that his mission was to rebuild the church, and so he literally began restoring church building structures. Over time, he clarified his understanding of God’s calling and committed to rebuilding the spiritual life of the church. In 1210, St. Francis and some of his followers obtained the permission of Pope Innocent III to begin the Order of Franciscan Friars.

**For Reflection:** What does it mean for you to be God’s instrument of peace and love – especially during this season of Lent?

**A Prayer for Today**

“Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred let me sow love.”