

# 1st Sunday of Lent, Year C

Br. Samuel Springuel

10 March, 2019

**1<sup>st</sup> Reading** Deuteronomy 26:4–10

**Responsorial Psalm** Psalm 91:1–2,10–11,12–13,14–15

**2<sup>nd</sup> Reading** Romans 10:8–13

**Gospel** Luke 4:1–13

Eight weeks ago we came to the end of the Christmas season with Luke’s version of the Baptism of Jesus. That story served as the culmination of what we might call Luke’s prologue. His main concern in the Gospel up to that point is to answer the question “Who is Jesus?” He has given us his answer in several different ways, but in the story of Jesus’s baptism we got it straight from the mouth of God himself and addressed directly to Jesus, “You are my Beloved Son.” No room is left for doubt. If we didn’t believe Gabriel, Elizabeth, the Angels, Simeon, and all the rest who had already identified Jesus as the Son of God, Luke has pulled out the last stop to convince us.

Since then the Lectionary has skipped forward, after a brief interlude in Cana from the Gospel of John, to focus on the early days of Jesus’s ministry. We have heard from Luke about how Jesus began his ministry in Galilee, announced it in Nazareth and was rejected, called the first disciples on the shores of the Lake of Gennesaret, and taught them along with large crowds in his Sermon on the Plain. We have been marching through Luke’s Gospel; following his chronology of Jesus’s ministry.

Today, however, we break with that marching order and circle back around to pick up a story which we skipped over in the transition from Christmastide to Ordinary Time. Jesus didn’t start preaching right after his baptism. He first went into the desert for forty days, we are told, and was tempted by the Devil.

That seems like quite a big event to have skipped over it so blithely. Why didn’t we hear about this earlier? Why save this episode, which comes near the beginning of Luke’s Gospel, for this season of Lent when we otherwise tend to focus on the events which come near the end?

Well, there is the obvious connection: today’s Gospel starts by telling us that Jesus spent 40 days fasting in the desert and we are at the start of Lent which is traditionally 40 days of prayers, fasting, and almsgiving as we prepare for Easter. The Gospel, and its position on this first Sunday of Lent, are a reminder that as we undertake our Lenten discipline, we are imitating Jesus’s own behavior.

There is more to mine here, though. Remember, everything prior to this story in Luke’s Gospel was about telling us who Jesus is: the Son of God. And we hear that title today, right from the Devil’s mouth. “If you are the Son of God, turn these stones into bread.” “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself

from the pinnacle of the Temple.”The Devil wants Jesus to take advantage of his relationship with God; to use it to satisfy personal desires, to show himself publicly, to make his task of preaching the Kingdom easier. Jesus refuses. He rejects the easy road, the one the Devil wants him to take, the one that human reason says he should take, because it is not the will of God. Jesus has come to feed the hungry and preach the Kingdom, but he has come to do so in God’s way, not the world’s way. He has come to be the Son who listens to his Father and is obedient to his will.

This point of view is brought out by what Luke sticks in between the Baptism and the Temptation narratives, something else we skipped over: Jesus’s genealogy. Jesus was, it was thought, the son of Joseph, son of Eli, son of Matthat, and so forth through 77 generations, all the way back to Seth son of Adam, son of God. Yes, Adam too was a son of God. Not quite in the same way that Jesus was, but still a son of God. He and Eve were not, however, content to listen to God’s commands. They reached out to take what they wanted, instead of waiting for God’s plan to unfold. As their children, we have all inherited this grabbiness, this desire to take what we want simply because we want it. Jesus, the new and perfect Son of God, has come to set things straight and show us how to live according to God’s will and not our own.

This is a message which stretches beyond our Lenten moment. It looks forward to the end of the Lenten season when we will celebrate the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus. This is how we are saved; this is how Jesus lived out his role as Son of God. And it is how we are called to live it out. For we are sons and daughters of God too, called to follow in the footsteps of Jesus and not Adam.

And that, ultimately, is why we undertake a Lenten discipline. We give something up, take on something extra, in order to prepare ourselves to follow Christ and obey God’s will. It is a way which is seldom easy, that is why we need the practice Lent offers, but it is the road to Easter, to resurrection and everlasting life.