

By Joan Mitchell, CSJ

Open a bible, light a candle, and place a plant beside them.

LEADER: Revive us again this spring, life-giving God.

ALL: Let us live the words that come from the mouth of God.

LEADER: Help us see ourselves as those we make angry see us and respond with integrity.

ALL: Create in us whole hearts, O God. Sustain our love in yours.

SUNDAY

by SUNDAY

Write to a shut-in Say, I'm sorry Waste no food this week Join a local spring cleanup Visit JustSouth Quarterly online Pray for the public person you dislike most Resist being the center of attention Refuse to gossip Refuse to whine



Readily forgive anyone who hurts you Surprise yourself Say, "I love you" Praise coworkers Bless a child in your life Refuse to judge or label others Spread hope Declutter and reuse Pray for an enemy Imagine peace Garden with a child or teen Reflect for 15 minutes Read *A Path Appears* Send a crocus to mend a fence Share a favorite prayer with someone younger Advocate for healthy food Examine your conscience Take the bus Learn the names of birds you see Walk Listen to a contrary point of view Breathe Spirit in; breathe your holy spirit into the world Learn



more about issues that bug you Extend welcome Include new voices in your decisions Plant a tree Thank God for life Eat in a neighborhood you never visit Write to your representatives in Congress Visit Network.org Volunteer to help a child Write a poem

The 40 days of Lent challenge us to transform our hearts and habits. To begin, the Lenten gospels poise us between temptation and transfiguration, inviting us to cease all that trivializes or demeans us and set our eyes on what awakens our spirits.

Spring is the season for reclaiming our spirit within that appreciates being alive, in love with family and friends,

and engaged with neighbors and coworkers.

As Earth awakens to spring, we open our eyes to new life in the cracks of our lives. We can find fresh words for our faith and new commitments to the actions it urges.

Lent is the season to cultivate a deeper consciousness of the love that abounds and surrounds us in creation and one another. The cross shape contains 40 practices for renewal.

GOSPEL

Jesus chooses his identity.

NARRATOR: Then the Spirit led Jesus into the desert to be tempted by the devil. Jesus fasted 40 days and 40 nights. At the end he was hungry.

TEMPTER: If you are the Son of God, command these stones to turn into bread.

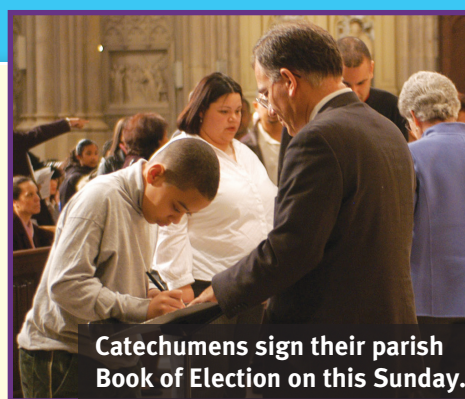
JESUS: Scripture says, "Not by bread alone do people live but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

NARRATOR: The devil took Jesus to the holy city and set him on the parapet, the very highest point, of the temple.

TEMPTER: If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. Scripture says, "God will order angels to take care of you; with their hands they will support you, so that you never stumble on a stone."

JESUS: Scripture also says, "You shall not put the Holy One your God to the test."

NARRATOR: The devil then took Jesus up a very high mountain and displayed before him all the magnificent kingdoms of the world.



Catechumens sign their parish Book of Election on this Sunday.

TEMPTER: All these will I bestow on you if you bow down and worship me.

JESUS: Away with you, Satan. Scripture says, "You shall worship the Holy One your God; only God shall you adore."

NARRATOR: At that the devil left Jesus, and angels came and ministered to him.

Matthew 4.1-11

What tests us in our deserts?

The devil in this story reports popular thinking—what the polls show people want. The devil describes a messiah who is an all-powerful warrior king with an angel army, a vindicator of apocalyptic proportions. This king will make Israel a nation among nations again. Even Jesus' closest disciples share these expectations.

When Jesus does not fulfill these expectations, most of his friends abandon him to a criminal's death on the cross. His crucifixion argues he is not the messiah from God. A crucified messiah is a contradiction. Why would the Son of God suffer death

when God has the power to do anything and save him?

The gospel asks us to examine the God we worship. Perhaps our God inspires success and personal gain more than service. Perhaps we blame God for letting bad things happen to good people. Or perhaps God seems too old-fashioned, pre-scientific, and irrelevant. Not Jesus, he refuses to put God to the test. He worships God alone, the first commandment, and lives by God's word.

● What images of God have you found false and left behind in your life? What images do you hold fast?

The temptation story is a verbal duel. The devil wants to know why, if Jesus is the Son of God, he refuses to use his divine powers for his own gain.

A lot of us have the devil's questions. If Jesus is the Son of God, why doesn't Jesus show what he can do? Why does evil happen? Why doesn't Jesus heal my child or save my spouse? Why doesn't Jesus provide the hungry children of the world loaves instead of stones?

Peter plays the same role the devil plays when Jesus first predicts his suffering, death, and resurrection. Peter says, "God forbid anything like this should happen to you."

“Get behind me, Satan,” Jesus says to Peter. “You are trying to make me stumble. You are not judging by God’s standards but by human standards” (16.22-23). Jesus’ followers have to correct their own notions of the messiah.

At stake in Jesus’ temptation is not only who he is but who we are, his followers. Jesus shuns divine stunts and opts for giving life through love and forgiveness. Lent calls us to discern how we are using our gifts toward building up our families and the human family.

To tempt means not only to entice, lure, urge, persuade but also to test, to put to proof, to try. Like desert time Lent is time for listening to the Spirit within us and in our interactions. We live directed by our own plans and choices but also alive in the buoyancy of God’s creative love.

Each year the temptation story from one of the synoptic gospels begins the Lenten season, calling us to test our knowledge of good and evil, to correct our course, to turn away from what numbs us or erodes our relationships. The story challenges us to live by the word of God.

- To what degree do you live by bread alone? To what degree by the Word of God?
- What is currently putting you to the test in your life?
- Whom do you trust and serve?
- What three temptations might Jesus face today in our world?

The first humans make a choice.

Sunday’s first reading tells the creation and temptation stories in Genesis 2-3. In this creation story God forms a *human* from the *humus*; in Hebrew God forms an *adam* from the *adamah*. Today most of us hear *adam* as a proper male name, but the word play links *human* and *humus*, literally an *earthling* to *earth*. How does substituting *human* for *adam* affect how you hear Genesis 2.7-9 below?

God gives life.

Creator God formed a human out of the humus of the ground and blew into the human the breath of life, and so the human became a living being. Then Creator God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and put the newly-formed human there. Out of the ground Creator God made various trees grow that are delightful to look at and good for food, with the tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Genesis 2.7-9

Sunday’s reading then skips God making the animals, the human naming them, and God building a partner for the human out of a rib bone. The reading focuses instead on the woman’s decision to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

NARRATOR: Now the serpent was the most cunning of all the animals that Creator God had made. The serpent asked the woman —

SERPENT: Did God really tell you not to eat from any of the trees in the garden?

WOMAN: We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; it is only about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God said, “You shall not eat it, or even touch it, lest you die.”

SERPENT: You will not die! God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing what is good and what is evil.

NARRATOR: The woman saw that the tree was good for food, delightful to the eyes, and desirable for gaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate it; and she also gave some to the man, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

Genesis 3.1-7

Archaeologists have found images of the goddess Asherah, the consort of the Canaanite god Baal, holding a lily in one hand and one or two serpents in the other. For ancient Canaanites, the snake represents immortality and knowledge.



The serpent of Genesis says that eating the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden will give the woman the divine qualities of knowledge and immortality. The woman uses her senses to observe that the fruit looks appealing and good to eat. The woman faces basic questions, “Who am I?” Am I like God? Am I like the animals?” The story gives her the intelligence to ask the questions and the freedom to choose.

The story sets before the woman much the same choice God sets before Israel in the book of Deuteronomy— “life and prosperity, death and doom. If you obey the commandments, statutes, and decrees, you will live and grow numerous, and the Holy One, your God, will bless you in the land you will occupy” (30.15-16). Like the woman and like us, the people of Israel use their freedom to make choices

and struggle to learn God’s ways through acquiring wisdom, the knowledge of what is good and what is evil.

As Genesis 3 tells the story of human freedom and sin, most of us hear in this story the loss of paradise. It is also the discovery of the human desire for the divine and infinite, the story of the human person as graced with an openness

to transcendence. In the seven days of creation Genesis 1 tells us all God makes is good. The woman’s choice in Genesis 3 tells us we are free. Through experience, we acquire knowledge of what is good and what is evil.

- In what sense is the woman’s exercise in freedom a step up rather than a fall down?
- How true to the way human beings are do you consider this story?
- How does the artist see the relationship between God and humans?

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DO SOMETHING

● Read stories about Catholic Relief Services’ work and the challenges a world away that people make their own. Visit CRS.org this Lent. Join in their work of charity and justice around the globe.

PRAY

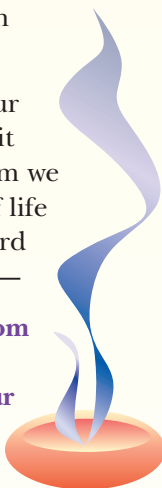
The English word *believe*, which we use in our baptismal promises, has come to mean “I think” or “This is my opinion.” Once it meant to *belove*, to *set one’s heart committedly*. Make a Lenten resolution for the week, then take time together to finish in your own ways the three *belove* statements below.

LEADER: We set our hearts on God, Father and Source, who creates the heavens and the earth, who—(*Add.*)

LEADER: We set our hearts on Jesus, God’s Son, who pours out his life in love for us and shows us all we can become, who—

LEADER: We set our hearts on the Spirit of God, from whom we have the breath of life and the urge toward communion, who—

ALL: Deliver us from success. Make us companions on our way together. Amen.



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