

**I LENT 2019**  
**SERMON-SAINT JOSEPH PARISH**  
**FATHER CRAIG LOONEY**  
**ST. MATTHEW 4.1-11**

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"The Devil made me do it" is a phrase made popular during the 1970s by African-American comedian Clerow "Flip" Wilson. It was often used by his on-screen alter-persona Geraldine to excuse extravagant shopping sprees.

Flip Wilson didn't invent the phrase. The first time "the Devil made me do it" was used as an excuse was in the Garden of Eden. When God confronted her with her disobedience, Eve blamed the Devil for tricking her into eating the fruit. Her excuse didn't get her off the hook.

Adam also ate the fruit. When God confronted him with his disobedience, he blamed the whole thing on Eve, accusing her of tricking him. His excuse didn't get him off the hook either.

Adam and Eve are equally guilty of disobeying God. However, they could not use the excuse "the Devil made me do it" to justify their disobedience. Adam and Eve were gifted with free will and they used their free will to make bad choices. We're living with the consequences of their choices today.

Shortly after his baptism by his cousin John and before he began his public ministry, Jesus goes off by himself into the desert to fast and pray. He is hungry and tired and at his most vulnerable. Along comes the Devil to try to trick Jesus.

First, the Devil tries to get Jesus to turn stones into bread. Jesus quotes Deuteronomy and tells the Devil man must not depend on bread alone to sustain him, but on everything the Lord says.

Second, the Devil takes Jesus up to the highest part of the Temple and tells him to jump. The Devil also knows Scripture and quotes Psalm 91, which says God will send angels to protect Jesus to keep him from hurting his feet on the stones. Jesus tells the Devil it's a bad idea to test God.

Finally, the Devil takes Jesus to a high mountain and shows him all of the world's richest countries and promises them to him if he will fall down and worship him. The Devil is delusional thinking Jesus would even

consider doing this. Jesus tells the Devil to go back to where he belongs...we are to worship and serve God alone. And, yes, angels did come to take care of Jesus.

Satan is called by many names: accuser; slanderer; adversary; trickster; liar; the Devil; the Great Deceiver; Lord of the Flies. Jesus allowed himself to be tested by Satan to demonstrate for us his full humanity and what he was willing to subject himself to on our behalf. There is nothing any of us experience in our own lives...good or bad...that Jesus hasn't experienced.

The time Jesus spent in the desert was in a sense his own Lenten journey. He was about to begin a mission none of us are likely to ever face and he had to prepare himself for what was to happen. In spite of his hunger and weakness...the Devil couldn't make Jesus give into his temptations.

What we learn from the time Jesus spent in the desert is how not to give into our temptations. Lent is an important time of fasting, spiritual growth and renewal...it is also a time when we may find ourselves the most vulnerable and open to Satan's attacks. That is where prayer becomes our most valuable tool. The Devil hates God-directed prayer.

We all get tested during our lifetimes. But we can never excuse ourselves by saying "the Devil made me do it". The Devil can't make us do anything against our will. He simply doesn't have that power.

Lent is our time in the desert. It's our time to confront our weaknesses, our sins, our guilt and asking God to help us get rid of the things that are holding us back so we can move forward...renewed and refreshed in knowing we are forgiven.

We can't deceive ourselves into thinking the Devil won't test us...he will take every opportunity to derail our plans. That's when we need to put forth some extra effort. That's when we need to have the courage to tell the Devil...the Great Deceiver...his tricks won't work on us.

"The Devil made me do it!" It's not an excuse we can use. Let's make certain we know when we're being tested...and then tell the Devil where he can go...just like Jesus did!

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