

I Lent 2021

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

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2 Cor. 6.1-10 St. Matthew 4.1-11

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Forty days and forty nights...Jesus was in the desert fasting and praying. Forty days and forty nights...Satan tempted Jesus. Jesus passed his probation period with flying colors. He sent Satan packing back to where he came from.

The number 40 appears 146 times in the Scriptures. It often refers to a period of testing, trial or probation.

God caused the rain to fall forty days and forty nights. Noah built a big boat so he and his family and the animals could wait out the biggest storm ever.

Moses and the Israelites wandered forty years in the desert. Moses spent forty days on Mount Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments from God. He had to go back for another forty days after he broke the first set of tablets in a fit of anger.

Jonah spent forty days warning the people of Nineveh their behavior was self-destructive and to turn back to God who was eager to forgive them. They listened to Jonah...and put on burlap clothes and threw ashes on themselves.

Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the Temple forty days after his birth so they could present him to God and buy him back with two doves. The Ascension took place forty days after Easter.

All three Synoptic Gospels record the time Jesus was in the desert being tempted by Satan. Of course, the devil didn't succeed in tempting Jesus. The devil knew Jesus was the Son of God. Jesus told the devil it was a dumb idea to think he could tempt God and to go away.

We are now in the Season of Lent...the forty-day period not including Sundays that began on Ash Wednesday and continues until the Saturday before Easter. Lent is our spiritual time of testing, trial and probation.

We sometimes get tempted to do things we know in our hearts is wrong? We are human beings and that means we are going to get tempted at various points in our lives. Our probationary period is this lifetime...during which we do our very best to avoid the occasions that cause us to turn away from God.

Saint Paul tells us we shouldn't be surprised when we find ourselves being tested. He also tells us that God will not allow us to be tested beyond our ability to endure the temptation. We are also promised that with every temptation that comes our way, there will always be a way out. The way out is Jesus himself.

All of the forty-day periods of trial, testing and probation we read about in the Scriptures ultimately lead positive changes in the lives of the people who experienced them. Lent gives us an opportunity to spend some time with Jesus in the spiritual desert we create for ourselves, through fasting and prayer and self-examination.

Whatever Lenten spiritual disciplines we set up for ourselves, we should approach them with joy and hearts open to positive change. We may choose to give up candy or ice cream. We may choose to take on a task...spending time reading the Bible or quiet reflective prayer. We should make every effort to complete our Lenten tasks and not give up after a few days. Lent can be a wonderful and rewarding time of spiritual growth.

What comes after our forty days and forty nights of trial, testing and probation? First, we need to learn to tell Satan to take a hike when we find ourselves getting tested. Lent is our spiritual time in the desert. We want to emulate Jesus and open up our hearts to the transformative power of God's grace...and the new life and new growth that follows.

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