

“BLESSED IS HE WHO HAS BEEN FOUND WORTHY TO SUFFER TEMPTATION!”



Carmelite Online Lenten Retreat 2025 — Thérèse of Lisieux and the Paschal Mystery

Gospel of Jesus Christ according to Saint Luke (Lk 4:1–13)

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.”

Jesus answered him, “It is written: One does not live by bread alone.”

Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. He said to him, “To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.”

Jesus answered him, “It is written: Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.”

Then the devil took him to Jerusalem and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple. He said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here; for it is written:

He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,

and on their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.”

Jesus answered him, “It is said: Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”

When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Trials and Temptations

The liturgy always presents the account of Jesus’ temptation in the desert on the First Sunday of Lent. This year, we hear Luke’s version, which corresponds to Year C.

What is the meaning of Jesus’ temptation in the desert? Why does the Church give us this passage to meditate on at the beginning of Lent?

We know that temptation itself is not a sin. Sin occurs when we give in to temptation and fail to resist it.



The three temptations recall the trials that the people of Israel experienced during their forty years in the desert. Their journey was not marked by obedience to God but by frequent rebellions. They put God to the test—a serious act of infidelity.

Jesus' experience, however, is the exact opposite: he passes through the desert in obedience, despite being tempted. It is important to note that Jesus is tempted by the devil, not by God. Scripture is clear: God does not tempt anyone.

Jesus undergoes temptation because it reveals his full humanity. As human beings, we cannot avoid being tempted. In the previous chapter of Luke's Gospel (chapter 3), Jesus' genealogy is traced all the way back to Adam. This emphasizes that Jesus is truly human—he is a descendant of the first man. But there is a fundamental difference: Adam gave in to the serpent's temptation (Gen 3:6), while Jesus resists the devil's threefold assault. The number three here is significant—it evokes the mystery of God himself.

The devil knows that Jesus is not just an ordinary man; he is the Son of God. The phrase “If you are the Son of God” should be understood as “Since you are the Son of God.”

In the first temptation, the devil invites Jesus to perform a miracle to satisfy his hunger after forty days of fasting—to turn a stone into bread. The suggestion is subtle. The devil is not asking Jesus to do something evil or disobey God his Father. He is simply encouraging him to take care of himself so that he does not collapse from hunger. There is no obvious sin in that. Resisting this temptation requires self-denial and immense self-mastery. Jesus responds with Scripture, citing Deuteronomy 8:3: “One does not live by bread alone.”

The second temptation is different: it explicitly invites Jesus to make an alliance with the devil. The devil offers him dominion over all the kingdoms of the world—if he worships him. This proposal is both audacious and revealing: how could Satan dare to suggest such a thing to the Son of God? Satan doesn't tell Jesus to abandon God entirely. Instead, he subtly claims to have received authority over all the kingdoms of the earth. But from whom, if not from God? Here, too, Jesus counters the temptation with this passage from Deuteronomy 6:13: “You shall worship the Lord your God, and him alone shall you serve.”

The third temptation appears to be less severe than the previous one, since what the devil presents is not bad in itself. By quoting Psalm 91, the devil, who knows the Scriptures well, implies two things: that since Jesus is the Son of God, God will protect him, as he has promised to his faithful. The devil thus tempts Jesus under the appearance of good: believing that God his Father will always protect him. Giving in to this temptation would mean forcing God's hand, putting him to the test. This third temptation will be repeated when, nailed to the cross, Jesus hears his adversaries invite him to come down and save himself. Jesus resists once again, citing Deuteronomy 6:16: “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.”

In response to all three temptations, Jesus stands firm in his obedience to the Father and his faithfulness to Scripture. He demonstrates self-mastery in resisting bodily needs, humility in rejecting power and glory, and wisdom in refusing to test God. This victory truly signifies that he is not merely a man. Only the Son of God could withstand these temptations, not without suffering in his humanity.



With Thérèse, Passing Through the “Storm”

“Blessed is the one who has been found worthy to suffer temptation!” These are the final words of Letter 105 (LT 105), which Thérèse wrote to her sister Céline on 10 May 1890. At the time, Céline was traveling with their sister Léonie and the Guérin family. In fact, it was a pilgrimage to Lourdes from 6 to 17 (or 18) May, with many tourist stops along the way: Le Mans, Tours (including a visit to the Holy Face Oratory of Mr. Dupont), Bordeaux, then Lourdes (the Cirque de Gavarnie) and after that Pau, Bayonne, San Sebastián, Biarritz, Bordeaux, La Rochelle, Nantes, and Angers.

To be blessed for suffering temptation? Temptation is always a source of suffering because, as this Sunday’s Gospel shows, it is a trial that exposes our limitations. While Jesus endures the trial brilliantly, we, as mere human beings, must ask ourselves—how do we stand up to it?

Our dear Thérèse seems to add yet another difficulty when she associates suffering temptation with the word blessed!

Little Thérèse is a great saint, as we know, so let’s listen to what she means.

In her letter to Céline, Thérèse asks about her experience during this trip centered on Lourdes. Is she happy? Has she received graces while visiting these sacred places—particularly the Holy Face Oratory in Tours—or while contemplating the beauty of nature, the mountains, the rivers? All this beauty certainly elevates the soul, but Thérèse then invites her sister to detach herself from earthly things, to let go of the consolations Jesus provides, in order to cling to Him alone! She also encourages her to remain close to the Blessed Virgin and to live in purity, for the pure in heart shall see God. But pure hearts are sometimes surrounded by thorns—a reference to the unavoidable trials of temptation. She concludes by affirming the happiness of those who suffer, that is, those who resist temptation. She even goes so far as to speak of the dignity of the one who suffers temptation.

That same day, Thérèse wrote another letter to her sister, Mother Agnes of Jesus (LT 106). Since Mother Agnes was on retreat and could not speak with her, Thérèse wrote: “How happy I am to be always a prisoner in Carmel; I have no desire to go to Lourdes to have ecstasies. I prefer (the monotony of sacrifice)! What a joy to be so hidden that nobody thinks of you ... to be unknown even to persons with whom you live ...”

How should we understand these two letters? Their content is different, yet not contradictory—on the contrary, they express the same thought, the same conviction of Thérèse: happiness is found in choosing Jesus, that is, in choosing heaven, and in living out this choice through the rigors and solitude of Carmel. She even uses the word prisoner—not to imply that she is sheltered from temptation, but rather that she faces the darkness head-on, accepting suffering and thus overcoming temptation, just as Jesus did in the desert.

The battle against temptation can be as violent as a storm! This is how Thérèse understands it in Letter 171, a note of encouragement she wrote to her sister Léonie, Sister Thérèse-Dosithée, on 11 October 1894, where she writes: “No, Jesus is sleeping while His poor spouse is fighting against the waves of temptation, but we are going to call Him so tenderly that He will awaken soon, commanding the wind and the storm, and calm will be restored ...”



In another letter, written years later to Abbé Maurice Bellière on 21 October 1896 (LT 198), Thérèse writes: “Now that the storm has passed, I thank God for having made you pass through it, for we read in our holy books these beautiful words: “Blessed is the man who has suffered temptation” (Jas 1:12), and again: “What does he know who has not been tempted?” (Sir 34:10). In fact, when Jesus calls a soul to direct and to save multitudes of other souls, it is necessary that He have him experience the temptations and trials of life. Since He has granted you the grace to come out victorious from the fight, I trust, Monsieur l’Abbé, that our gentle Jesus will realize your great desires. I am asking Him that you may be not only a good missionary but a saint all on fire with the love of God and souls; I beg you to obtain also for me this love so that I may help you in your apostolic work.”

For Thérèse, it is clear that temptation is an unavoidable passage for those who wish to follow Christ.

In her early years, she faced a form of temptation—mild in intensity, we might say, but a classic struggle in the spiritual life: scruples. She writes in Manuscript A (folio 39 recto): “The year following my First Communion passed almost entirely without any interior trials for my soul. It was during my retreat for the second Communion [21 May 1885] that I was assailed by the terrible sickness of scruples. One would have to pass through this martyrdom to understand it well, and for me to express what I suffered for a year and a half would be impossible.”

Because she had experienced this herself, Thérèse was able to respond in Letter 92, written on 30 May 1889, to her cousin Marie Guérin: “My dear little Sister, You did well to write me, and I understand everything ... everything, everything, everything! ... You haven’t committed the shadow of any evil; I know what these kinds of temptations are so well that I can assure you of this without any fear, and, besides, Jesus tells me this in the depths of my heart ... We must despise all these temptations and pay no attention whatsoever to them.” The rest of the letter makes it clear that Marie was going through a crisis of scruples. Thus, despising temptations is also a form of resistance. Just as fleeing from an evil that could overwhelm you is sometimes the wisest course of action.

Thérèse gives us a message of confidence in Jesus. She knows that he is the true victor over temptation and that it is with him that we must stand when we face these trials.

At the beginning of this Lent, let’s pray to Jesus through the intercession of Saint Thérèse, to grant us the strength to suffer and to overcome every temptation!

Fr. Robert Arcas, ocd (Avon convent)



Pray each day of the week with Saint Thérèse – Week 1

Monday, 10 March: Following the Saints

"I have always wanted to be a saint ..." (Manuscript C, folio 3 recto).

"You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy" (Lv 19, 2).

What saint(s) will I take as a model? With my own personality, my strengths, and weaknesses, I will entrust my deepest desires to God.



Tuesday, 11 March: Working with Him

"[Jesus] made Himself poor that we might be able to give Him love. He holds out His hand to us like a beggar so that on the radiant day of judgment [...] He may have us hear those sweet words" (LT 145).

"Come, you that are blessed by my Father [...] for I was hungry and you gave me food" (Mt 25:34–35).

How will I take part in God's work within my vocation and remain in communion with the Church?

Wednesday, 12 March: Trust!

"... let us love our littleness, let us love to feel nothing, then we shall be poor in spirit, and Jesus will come to look for us, and however far we may be, He will transform us in flames of love ... [...] it is confidence and nothing but confidence that must lead us to Love" (LT 197).³

"Unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 18:3).

To be a Christian is to trust in Christ's unconditional love. How will I experience my relationship with Him? Will I be docile to His love?



Thursday, 13 March: Embracing Poverty

"... we must consent to remain always poor and without strength, and this is the difficulty ..." (LT 197).

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:3).

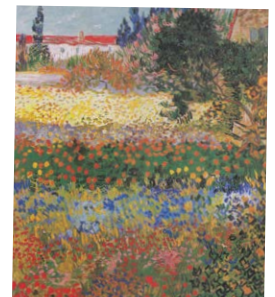
Am I capable of abandoning what burdens me, both materially and psychologically, to allow Him to take His rightful place?

Friday, 14 March: Marveling at My Littleness

"... I am not disturbed at seeing myself weakness itself. On the contrary, it is in my weakness that I glory, and I expect each day to discover new imperfections in myself" (Ms C 15r).

"God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong" (1 Cor 1:27). "If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness" (2 Cor 11:30).

Although I surely have many faults and have sinned, Thérèse reminds me that despite all this, we are deeply loved.



Saturday, 15 March: Hoping for Great Things

"... our infinite desires [for holiness] are not, then, either dreams or fancies, since Jesus Himself has given us this commandment!" (LT107),

"Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48).

Take time to meditate on the "Our Father."