

## Lent 1 (2025)

We are all familiar with potholes. They are the bane of every motorist. Not only are they a nuisance, if you hit them just right, they can do significant damage to your vehicle.

Potholes also exist on the roadway of life. You might call them challenges or in line with today's Gospel temptations.

These potholes can cause serious damage. Learning to navigate around them is part of the Christian calling.

The fact of temptation is incontestable.

They are all around us. Changing metaphors, they are like candy in a candy store. They come in all shapes, sizes and flavors.

Yes, as we discover in today's Gospel, even Jesus faced them.

Before we go further, let me give you the theological underpinnings of the Temptations of Christ . . . how this story fits into the larger narrative of scripture.

I don't know if you have ever thought about it, but the Jesus story is a retelling of both the story of Adam and the story of Israel.

Put on your thinking caps and stay with me, as I explain how.

Humans were created to be wise caretakers of God's good creation. But after they rebelled against God and became subject to sin and death, they were no longer able to fulfill this role, at least perfectly.

What resulted, as seen in the story recorded in Genesis. was a break in fellowship, not only with God, but with other humans as witnessed by Cain killing his brother Abel.

More than that, there was a fracturing and a downward thrust involving creation. Weeds and thistles invade the soil of this earth.

The good news is that God did not abandon either His human creatures or creation.

Rather, right from the start, He sets in motion a plan of restoration and rescue.

The first hint of this plan comes in Genesis 3:15. Here we are told that the serpent will bruise the heel of the seed of woman, but the seed of woman will bruise the serpent's head.

What is being promised here is that Satan will give humans a lot of grief, but in the end his destruction is sure. The fatal blow will be wielded by an offspring of Eve.

Where am I going with this? /// Jesus is that offspring. He is the Seed of Woman.

Adam (and before him Eve) succumbed to temptation. Jesus did not. The second head of the human race succeeded where the first failed.

So, in the Jesus story we find first a retelling of the story of Adam, but also a retelling of the story of Israel.

The vocation of Abraham's offspring, in particular those who became known as Israel, was to bring rescue and healing to the human race. "In you and in your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed," God told the patriarch on more than one occasion.

Fast forward to the exodus, what happened to the children of Israel after their rescue from the slavery of Egypt? ///

They went into the wilderness for 40 years and there faced many temptations. There were

many potholes along the way. They fell into most of these.

But what happened to Jesus? /// He went into the wilderness (the desert) for 40 days and likewise faced temptations, but He succeeded where Israel failed.

The vocation of Israel is narrowed down onto one particular Israelite, Jesus the Messiah, and He stays on course and wins the victory.

But the story is more than historical. It has instruction for us.

No one is exempt from the temptations of life. Even the Son of Man faced them. Each one recorded in today's Gospel was designed to get Him off track from His messianic mission.

The Tempter – the devil if you please – seeks to work the same mischief in us. He

attempts to get us off track from the calling given to us in our baptism.

He does so in many different ways. In some church communities, for example, he gets the members at odds with each other. Maybe you have been in such churches.

Instead of everyone pulling together – instead of letting the Gospel be the main thing – everyone focuses on competing, lesser, agendas. As a result, little or no kingdom work gets done. The atmosphere at times becomes toxic.

All the time, Satan is sitting back in his chair smirking. He has achieved his objective. He has dug potholes, and Jesus' people have stepped into them.

I could give many other examples, but this one will suffice. Just stay on guard. Make being an ambassador for Christ and His Church your first priority.

Keep giving out those “A Safe Place to Explore Faith” cards. Keep serving others in Christ’s name. Stay on course, just as Jesus stayed on course.

Moving on, we have every reason to believe that the temptations of Christ did not end in the desert. Many more were to follow.

Remember what happened to Him on the cross. Those looking on taunted Him with the words: **“If you are the Messiah – come down from that cross. Call for the angels to rescue you.”**

That was a real temptation. But Jesus did not yield to it. Because He didn’t, heaven’s gate has been opened to all believers. You and I are the beneficiaries. ///

The knowledge Jesus was tempted should serve as a source of comfort to us. It reminds us that we are not alone in the battle of life. We

have Someone in heaven who understands our plight and cares.

When confronted by temptation, a person might imagine that temptation is a sign that he is not a real Christian. Or that he has fallen out of the reach of the love and care of God. Not so.

The author of Hebrews says as much when he writes:

**“For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.”**

He then proceeds to tell us what we should do when we find ourselves in this predicament: **“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”**



What challenges are you facing at this moment in your life?

They may be different from the ones Jesus faced in today's Gospel but be assured Jesus understands and cares.

The God we meet in Jesus is for you. He wants you to succeed.

But what if you step into one of those potholes?

Does God, in the lingo of today, 'cancel' you? /// NO!

Again and again, we find in the Gospels the One who puts a human face on the invisible God being infinitely merciful and forgiving. He restores those who have failed in their storm-tossed life, those who seek forgiveness and help.

Think about His response to the woman caught in the act of adultery. After her accusers had slunk away, He says to her: "**Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more.**"

Think of His response to Peter's great denial on the eve of His crucifixion. Following His resurrection, He takes Peter aside and gives him an opportunity to confess Him three times, just as Peter on that fateful night had denied Him three times. He restores and uses Peter mightily.

The devil wants to sideline you. The Lord of Life wants to put you back in the race.

Temptation is a fact of life but so are God's gracious provisions.

In closing, some key points are:

--God cares and loves us. He is for us and in the fight with us. We are not alone.

--God allows challenges not to defeat us, but to make us strong. As iron is tempered in fire, so God allow us to pass through the fires of life.

--The challenges we face should serve to make us more understanding of the challenges of others. As God has been longsuffering and gracious to us, so are we to be with our fellow human beings.

-- Finally, we have been given a powerful weapon with which to meet temptation. That weapon is the Bible. Three times the devil came to Jesus; three times He responded with the words: It is written. Follow Jesus' example. Know and use your Bible.

Returning to my opening metaphor. The roadway of life is littered with potholes, but you don't have to step into everyone you pass by. Jesus has shown us a better way.

Put your hand in the hand of Jesus and go forward.