

LENT: IN FAITH WE JOURNEY WITH JESUS

First Sunday in Lent
February 25, 2007

Deuteronomy 26:1-11
Psalm 91:1,2, 9-16
Romans 10:8b-13
Luke 4:1-13

Worship the Lord Your God

“If you are God’s Son ...”

This week’s Gospel text recounts the devil’s three attempts to test Jesus, including two challenges to Jesus’ sonship. In all three instances, Jesus draws upon the power of God’s Word and responds by quoting Scripture, texts of instruction given to Israel during its trials in the wilderness (Deuteronomy 8:3, 6:13, 6:16). Unlike the Israelites’ failure to trust in God, Jesus exhibits steadfast faithfulness and obedience, and thus offers us a model for resisting temptation.

While three attempts to tempt Jesus are cited, it is interesting that the text points out that Jesus was tested by the devil for forty days. Each day that Jesus spent in the desert – going without food and getting weaker day by day – temptation was ever present. The devil also sought to use Scripture in an effort to seduce Jesus; but Jesus, filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, resisted the cunning offer of worldly power and responded, “Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him” (Luke 4:8, *CEV*).

This week’s Old Testament lesson includes a liturgical recitation of the Law with regard to the ritual of offering one’s “first fruits” accompanied by a confession of faith. This giving of the first fruits of the harvest served to remind the Hebrew people that their blessings came from God. It is God who saved and preserved them and who had now brought them to “this land rich with milk and honey” (Deuteronomy 26:9, *CEV*). The passage concludes with an exhortation to share God’s bounty with others. Giving out of our abundance and giving to those in need are the markings of true worship.

How would you describe your worship life, particularly in light of these biblical texts? The prophet Isaiah describes “what it really means to worship the LORD.” Rather than fasting and wearing sackcloth and ashes, the prophet exhorts us to “remove the chains of prisoners who are chained unjustly; free those who are abused; share [our] food with everyone who is hungry; share [our] homes with the poor and homeless; give clothes to those in need” (58:6,7, *CEV*). Mere ritual and simply remembering are not enough. True worship involves serving others in love and treating all people with fairness and justice.

The apostle Paul, quoting from Deuteronomy 30:14, reminds us that God's message is as near as our mouth or our heart (Romans 10:8b). In other words, we cannot claim ignorance of what God now expects of us since God's law has been inscribed on our hearts (Jeremiah 31:33). Jesus told us that the two most important commandments are to love God and to love others (Matthew 22:37-39). In so doing, we accomplish all that the Law demands (Romans 12:8). Thus, we boldly proclaim that "Jesus is Lord" (Romans 10:9) and offer ourselves in service to God as "a living sacrifice, pure and pleasing" (Romans 12:1) in grateful response to God's unconditional love for us.

As we prepare to embark on our own forty-day Lenten journey, we, too, will face temptation daily and, yes, we may even yield to its seductive power. Yet, we are mindful that our loving God "understands every weakness of ours" because Jesus "was tempted in every way that we are" and Jesus' sacrificial death makes it possible for us to "come bravely before the throne of our merciful God" where "we will be treated with undeserved kindness" (Hebrews 4:15,16, *CEV*). Let us gird ourselves with the Word of God, "keep our eyes on Jesus, who leads us and makes our faith complete" (Hebrews 12:2, *CEV*), and worship the Lord our God and serve only him.

This week's Reflection was prepared by Barbara Bernstengel, who serves on the staff of the American Bible Society as Director of the Education Unit in the Nida Institute for Biblical Scholarship.

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This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: Lebanon – With thanks to God for the successful Year of the Family campaign, and with prayers for work on the *Book of Hope* and with the *Just for Kids* drama team, through which Scripture Portions as part of Bible-based programs are being provided; **Cyprus** – With thanks to God for the Greek New Testaments which were distributed by the Ministry of Education to all schools in the country and for the camouflage edition Greek New Testaments that were distributed free of charge to the army, and with prayers that these Scriptures will bear fruit among children and adults; **Turkey** – With thanks to God for the completion and printing of the New Testament in the Kurmanji dialect of Kurdish and for the completion of the Syriac scholarly edition, and with prayers for the completion of the Turkish Bible Dictionary, the first of its kind, and for funds that will enable the completion of the Kurdish Old Testament.

Activity Corner: "Spiritual Nourishment" Calendars

Supplies needed: photocopies of 8-1/2 x 11 calendar pages (with boxes for each date) for the months of February, March, and April 2007; pens or pencils.

The season of Lent offers us a disciplined time to reflect on choices we make each day in light of how those choices may or may not nourish our spiritual life. People often talk about things they plan to "give up" for Lent; i.e., sweets, watching television, etc. Invite members of your household to think about ways they plan to choose to expand their opportunities for spiritual nourishment.

Instead of thinking about things to “give up,” encourage them to think of things to “add on;” i.e., spending more time in daily Bible reading and prayer; attending additional opportunities for Bible study and worship; reading devotional books; reading Bible stories to younger children; volunteering their time for community service, etc. Throughout the days in Lent, ask each member of your household to write down their choices on copies of calendars (what they plan to do each day), beginning with February 25 through April 7. At the end of each week, discuss as a family your reflections on your activity choices and their impact on spiritual nourishment. Consider keeping a family journal of these thoughts and reflections and/or incorporate these thoughts into your prayers during family devotional time.