

## **LORD, DO NOT LET US FALL INTO TEMPTATION**

(Lectio Divina of the First Sunday of Lent -2021)

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### **In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.**

**Opening Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, we are now in the holy season of Lent. We realize that these are the days of salvation and spring in our prayer life. We know who we are that in many ways we have offended Your infinite majesty. We know that our sin destroys Your life in us. Help us now in our feeble attempts to make up for our past failures. Bless our efforts with the rich blessing of Your grace. Make us realize ever more our need of penance and of mortification. Help us to see, in our ordinary difficulties and duties, in the trials and temptations of every day, the best opportunity of making up for past failures and sins. You know that we are set in the midst of so many dangers, that by reason of the frailty of our nature we cannot always stand upright. Grant us such strength and protection, to support us in all danger and carry us through all temptations. We make this prayer through our Lord. Amen.

### **First Reading: A Reading from the book of Genesis 9:8-15**

God said to Noah and to his sons with him: "See, I am now establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you and with every living creature that was with you: all the birds, and the various tame and wild animals that were with you and came out of the ark. I will establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all bodily creatures be destroyed by the waters of a flood; there shall not be another flood to devastate the earth." God added: "This is the sign that I am giving for all ages to come, of the covenant between me and you and every living creature with you: I set my bow in the clouds to serve as a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth, and the bow appears in the clouds, I will recall the covenant I have made between me and you and all living beings, so that the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all mortal beings." (*The Word of the Lord/ Thanks be to God*)

**Commentary:** The first readings speaks about God's covenant with Noah after the Deluge. The covenant with Noah was very simple. It consisted mainly of God's promise to care for the earth and not to destroy it again by a flood. Through the sign of the rainbow, God promised Noah that He would love and care for Noah's descendants and for the earth that they inhabited. The sign of the covenant with Noah was the rainbow which links heaven and earth. Rainbow symbolizes Jesus a link between God (heaven) and human beings (earth). The story of the salvation of Noah and his family from the waters became an inverse symbol of Baptism: In the waters of baptism, we die to sin and get incorporated into the Church, the Body of Christ, the living Christian community.

Responsorial Psalm (25) ***Your ways, O Lord, are love and truth to those who keep your covenant.***

Your ways, O Lord, make known to me; teach me your paths,  
Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my savior.  
*R. Your ways, O Lord, are love and truth to those who keep your covenant.*

Remember that your compassion, O Lord, and your love are from of old.  
In your kindness remember me, because of your goodness, O Lord.  
*R. Your ways, O Lord, are love and truth to those who keep your covenant.*

Good and upright is the Lord, thus he shows sinners the way.  
He guides the humble to justice, and he teaches the humble his way.  
*R. Your ways, O Lord, are love and truth to those who keep your covenant.*

**Second Reading: A reading from the first letter of St. Peter 3:18-22**

Beloved: Christ suffered for sins once, the righteous for the sake of the unrighteous, that he might lead you to God. Put to death in the flesh, he was brought to life in the Spirit. In it he also went to preach to the spirits in prison, who had once been disobedient while God patiently waited in the days of Noah during the building of the ark, in which a few persons, eight in all, were saved through water. This prefigured baptism, which saves you now. It is not a removal of dirt from the body but an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers subject to him. *(The word of the Lord/ Thanks be to God)*

**Commentary:** Lent is a solemn and prayerful remembrance Jesus' Paschal Mystery-Suffering, Death and Resurrection. It culminates with the joyful Baptism of new members into the church. All these elements are packed into the second reading from the letter of Peter to the persecuted Christians of the Church in order to strengthen their faith in crisis. As the rainbow was an outward sign of God's covenant with Noah in the OT, Immersion in the waters of Baptism in Jesus' name is an outward of God's covenant with us in the NT. Baptism not only removes Original Sin but is also our birth into Christ. Through which way we become God's adopted children, heirs of heaven and temples of the Holy Spirit. The waters of Baptism are an antitype of the waters of the flood. The flood waters destroyed almost all the people except Noah's family. The waters of Baptism on the other hand are the cleansing agent that saves all.

**Gospel Reading: A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to St. Mark 1:12-15**

The Spirit drove Jesus out into the desert, and he remained in the desert for forty days, tempted by Satan. He was among wild beasts, and the angels ministered to him. After John had been arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God: "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."  
*(The Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ / Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ)*

**Meditation:** Each year, the first Sunday in Lent, invites us to meditate on the temptation of our Lord Jesus Christ. The temptation of Jesus is given to remind us of facing temptation without sinning and getting strength from him through prayer and worship because he went through the same experience. He was led by the Spirit of God into the desert to be tempted so that every creature in heaven, on earth, or under the earth might know that Jesus Christ is the conqueror. He exposed Satan and his tactics and defeated Satan. Like he became victorious over the devil, we are invited to have victory over the tempter whichever form he may appear. During his temptation, the angels ministered to him meaning Jesus was comforted by the angels who had a significant role in his earthly life - Announcing Jesus' birth to Blessed Mother, Reassuring Joseph, Naming Jesus, Announcing Jesus' birth to the shepherds, Protecting Jesus by sending his family to Egypt and Ministering to Jesus in Gethsemane.

**Catechism of the Catholic Church:** Every one of us experiences temptation no matter how spiritual we are. The **Catechism of the Catholic Church #538** defines temptation *as an attraction, either from outside oneself or from within, to act contrary to right reason and the commandments of God.*

**What is temptation?** Temptation is not a sin. It is simply an enticement and work of the devil to drag us to hell. It becomes a sin only we give ourselves into temptation. We tend to think that temptation is making us weak and commit sin. On the other hand, it is meant to make us good, enabling us to conquer sin. The English word 'temptation' is coming from the Latin word *temptare* which means 'to feel or try out'. Therefore the word 'temptation' in itself does not connote anything bad.

**Why temptation?** A blacksmith puts an iron in the hot fire and waits for the iron to glow. When it is really hot and glowing, he hammers the glowing iron to change the shape he wants. Likewise God allows temptations in our life not to punish us but to shine us and glow us in our life. For example, when we buy a computer, we notice a little sticker saying "Hardware tested". It is not negative but positive. It means that the computer has been examined and proven to be genuine and ready to work. In that sense, temptation is necessary for us because as people of intellect and reason, we have the will and ability to overcome the temptation. God does not tempt us beyond our ability (1 Cor 10:13).

**What is the source of temptation?** God is not the source of temptation. St. James in his letter says very clearly "*When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed*". (James 1:13-14). The sources of temptation according to John is the world and the flesh. He says in 1 John 2:16 "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world" The church's traditional teaching is that there are seven most basic sinful drives. They are namely Pride, Greed, Lust, Anger, Gluttony, Envy, and Sloth. These serve as deep sources of temptation. We should not allow these sinful drives to enslave us.

**Pope Francis' interpretation:** Few years back, Pope Francis in his interview to a catholic television TV2000 made a theological point. He suggests a change in our Lord's Prayer. According to him, the phrase "*Lead us not into temptation*" in the Lord's prayer, creates confusion or it is not a good translation. He argues that God would not lead anybody toward sin. He suggests a better translation like "*do not let us fall into temptation*" It is we who fall. It is not God who throws us into temptation and then sees how we fell.

**Cultural ambient for temptations:** Our physical body is genetically programmed to yield to temptations. Besides that, we are surrounded by temptations everywhere. Electronic devices, Secular philosophies, Addiction to Consumerism and Commercialism, Inordinate desire for more money by any means and so on. Thus temptations are everywhere and they are sure to come in our life. If Jesus had temptation, who are we? As humans, irrespective of age, we are all vulnerable to sinful pleasures, easy money and other vices. It is during those weak moments, we need to confront and conquer the temptations as Jesus did, using the spiritual weapons he employed: what are they? Prayer, Penance and the Word of God. When we use these powerful weapons, nothing can easily seduce us to sin. We read in 1 Jn 4:4 "The One who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world". Let us therefore confront tempting moments with personal prayer, meditative reading of the word of God and participating in the Holy Mass and making a good confession.

**Tempting and Testing?** Sometimes we hear people saying *God is tempting me too much*. It is not true. God will never tempt us because He is all good. He will only test us. What is the difference between testing and tempting? Testing is for rewarding someone while Tempting is for defeating someone. God tested the faith of Abraham and He tested the integrity of Job. Jesus tested the confidence of Peter. These people won the test and we know their rewards beyond their imagination. Tests are painful and inevitable but if we handle them with his strength, they become moments of glory in His time although painful at present. Sufferings are all test from God to know whether we are strong in our faith and integrity like Abraham and Job. In short God tests us to help us mature in our faith, serve as an example for others and receive spiritual rewards beyond our imagination later on. Let us therefore confront tempting moments with personal prayer, meditative reading of the word of God and participating in the Holy Mass and making a good confession. May this holy season of Lent make us holy by resisting all sorts of temptations with the help of our prayer, fasting and charity. Amen

**Concluding Prayer:** Lord Jesus Christ, Thank you for giving us this season of Lent, a time of prayer, reflection and conversion. For our sake, you fasted forty days and allowed yourself to be tempted. Protect us so that we may not be led astray by any temptation. Since man does not live by bread alone, nourish our souls with the heavenly food of your Word; Help us to overcome our weakness and temptations with your strength coming from our prayer life. Let everything we do in this holy season come from you and be inspired by you. Help us to remember that nothing is important in our life unless it glorifies you in some way. Teach us to do your will, that we may inwardly love you before all things with a pure mind. For you are our redeemer, our help, our comfort, our trust, our hope.