

Devotions for the first week of Lent – February 23-27, 2026

Monday of Lent 1 – Prayer of the Week

O Lord God, You led Your ancient people through the wilderness and brought them to the promised land. Guide the people of your Church that following our Savior we may walk through the wilderness of this world toward the glory of the world to come; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

A number of years ago my brothers and I elected to go on a backpacking trip into the Cloud Peak wilderness in the Bighorn mountains to do a little fishing. There are a pair of lakes up there aptly named Lost Twin lakes which promised success even to a miserable angler such as I am. We strapped our fishing gear onto our backpacks, set out from a trail head, and headed uphill. It poured on us that first day. We could not get a fire lit. It was mighty miserable there for a while. But thanks to one brother who had been there before, we did not get totally lost.

That experience really brought home to me just how dependent I am on roads and the structures of life. In a wilderness area there are very few of those things, no roads, a path or two, but sometimes that disappears. There are miles and miles of empty places. One could get very lost.

We of course have our GPS enabled devices now. But that is no guarantee. A few years a young couple met with disaster in southern Oregon. They were following what their phone said was a road, a short-cut between the highway and the coast. It was just an old logging trail. Their car got stuck. The father perished while trying to hike out and get help.

We pass through another sort of wilderness in this life. Getting lost is a genuine possibility with dire consequences. We pray that God leads us to the glory of the world come which we have not seen yet. Along the way there are predators and worse who would waylay and even destroy us. Pray this prayer with fervor. You and I need our God's help to make it to that other side safely. We did catch fish that day. Even I caught fish. It was good to be guided to the right place.

Tuesday of Lent 1 – Genesis 3:1-21

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made.

He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?"² And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden,³ but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'"⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die.⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her

husband who was with her, and he ate. ⁷ Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

⁸ And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" ¹⁰ And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." ¹¹ He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" ¹² The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." ¹³ Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

¹⁴ The LORD God said to the serpent,

"Because you have done this,
cursed are you above all livestock
and above all beasts of the field;
on your belly you shall go,
and dust you shall eat
all the days of your life.

¹⁵ I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel."

¹⁶ To the woman he said,

"I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing;
in pain you shall bring forth children.
Your desire shall be for your husband,
and he shall rule over you."

¹⁷ And to Adam he said,

"Because you have listened to the voice of your wife
and have eaten of the tree
of which I commanded you,
'You shall not eat of it,'

cursed is the ground because of you;
in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;

¹⁸ thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;
and you shall eat the plants of the field.

¹⁹ By the sweat of your face

you shall eat bread,
till you return to the ground,
for out of it you were taken;
for you are dust,
and to dust you shall return.”

²⁰ The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living. ²¹ And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.

My friend had broken a piece of equipment on his father's farm. It was an accident, but it was still broken. What my friend did not know was that his father had seen him do it. But his father did not come out immediately to scold him for being careless. Some time later they came to that piece of equipment, and it would not work. The father noticed that it was broken and asked if his son knew what had happened. The boy, afraid of his father's response, said, “No, I don't.”

The father sighed to himself, and they went on to fix it and resume the task at hand. Later, however, my friend admitted it to his father. His exact phrase was that he “fessed up to it.” And his father smiled. He told him that he knew all along what had happened. He was really hoping that his son would admit it and be honest about it. That was far more important than any broken piece of machinery.

The Lord God comes into the garden calls out for Adam and Eve. Is he really searching for them or is something else happening? He knows that they are hiding behind the Rhododendron over there. He knows exactly what they have done, but He calls out to them. He longs for that honest response. He questions them. He wants them to “fess up.” Not because it doesn't matter what they did, but because their road home, their life restored, must run through that honest place. He wants to bring them truly home.

This Lenten season is a time for honesty. God wants it. He loves you despite your lies and hiding from the truth, but He delights in your honesty about who you are, your thoughts, and your deeds, and your words. His favorite part of the Sunday service is when sinners confess their sins and He forgives them all.

Wednesday of Lent 1 – Psalm 32:1-7

¹ Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.

² Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity,
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

³ For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away
through my groaning all day long.

⁴ For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Selah

⁵ I acknowledged my sin to you,
and I did not cover my iniquity;
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,"
and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah

⁶ Therefore let everyone who is godly
offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found;
surely in the rush of great waters,
they shall not reach him.

⁷ You are a hiding place for me;
you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with shouts of deliverance. Selah

Not long ago I sat in a hospital with a dying man. Everyone knew he was dying, including the man in the bed. There were no claims of unfairness or cries for more time. He was weary. He was ready to die. What made the biggest difference for him was the truth that the psalmist speaks in this wonderful psalm. Blessed is the man whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sin is covered. He had quite a few of those sins to cover. He knew that. He also knew they were covered.

Dying is often a difficult and wearisome thing. It is hard work. He did not relish this, but he was not afraid. He rested in the confidence that Jesus had died for him. He awaited the loving embrace of Christ.

Surely in the rush of great waters, even the waters of that cold and sullen stream we call death, they shall not reach him, not really. Yes, my friend died. But death did not get to keep him. He had a hiding place, someone who preserved him from real trouble, who surrounded him with shouts of deliverance. He was forgiven. He had Christ.

Thursday of Lent 1 – Romans 5:12-19

¹² Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned— ¹³ for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. ¹⁴ Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.

¹⁵ But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. ¹⁶ And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. ¹⁷ For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

¹⁸ Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. ¹⁹ For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

As I write these words my thoughts are drawn to the events of the recent COVID pandemic. In the early months of that event, the school where I taught had moved all its classes online. We could not gather for church services or for anything really. One of the burning questions which the epidemiologists and others who study such things were asking then and continue to ask today was, “who was the first person who caught this disease?” That person is often called patient zero or the index patient. Even today some claim it was a lab-leak and others insist it was an interspecies jump at a wet market in China when this virus first infected us. Knowing this might help us plan for the next pandemic they say. I don’t know about that, but I would like to know who it was. Now, of course, the virus has run around the world. Doctors tell us that COVID will be with us like the flu or colds are just a part of life. There will be an annual flu and COVID shot.

Paul speaks of two other first men who infect the human race. Adam’s infection was the infection of sin. His disease brought us death. We have gotten used to that, sort of. Just like we are far more nonchalant about someone who has COVID these days. We ask if it is a bad case, and if not, we shrug and go on. We drive by cemeteries and attend funerals, saddened, but not surprised. We even come to terms that one day, for some reason, it will be my funeral which people attend. Paul reminds us that it was not supposed to be that way. Adam’s disobedience did this to us.

But there is another first Man whom Paul speaks of here, one whose “infection” is different than Adam’s. For Jesus communicates to us not some virus which destroys, but the righteousness which leads to life itself. Jesus is life. He doesn’t merely have life. He is life. When he speaks, touches, and encounters the sinful people in the Gospels they are healed, cleansed, raised, and fed. From Him radiates life itself, through baptism, right to you.

Friday of Lent 1 – Matthew 4:1-11

¹ Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ And the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.”

⁴ But he answered, “It is written,

“‘Man shall not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple ⁶ and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written,

“‘He will command his angels concerning you,’

and

““On their hands they will bear you up,
lest you strike your foot against a stone.””

⁷ Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’” ⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ⁹ And he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to him, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written,

““You shall worship the Lord your God
and him only shall you serve.””

¹¹ Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

Occasionally we get to see someone do something truly remarkable. I understand that Neil Armstrong’s lunar landing, the first time someone had ever done that, almost was a disaster. An error in the trajectory of the descent from lunar orbit meant the place he was approaching did not have a place to land. He was forced to look for a safe landing place. By the time he found one, he only had seconds of fuel left when he touched down. I would have been a nervous wreck, but he coolly and calmly set his craft on that alien world. I found this little clip from NASA about it. You can watch it here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nOcDftgR5UQ>

In the reading before us, we see what is possibly the greatest victory any human has ever had. Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Mary and Joseph, a carpenter by training who recently has taken up a new career as itinerant preacher, successfully resisted the temptation of the Devil. Of course, you might argue, He was also the Son of God and had powers beyond our reckoning. I am not denying that, but I am going to assert that this was a real temptation and Jesus, the human being, won this victory.

That is critically important for us. The second person of the Trinity, the Word, has taken up our nature to Himself. He did not wear our humanity like some garment he could discard. He became human, really human, subject to all our frailty. Most critically, he could die as He did on Calvary. His victory over temptation and the tempter which we read in this passage and in the other Gospel accounts is very much our human victory. One of us triumphed. He has done what no one else has done. We have all succumbed to the tempter’s blandishments and threats. No one of us, except Him, really understands the full power of Satan’s temptation. We cave in too fast. Satan just doesn’t need to work that hard on us. The tempter gave it his best shot when he tempted Jesus. He failed. Rejoice with all the world today that Jesus has won this victory for you.