

First Sunday in Lent - February 22, 2026

Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations.

These words from today's collect caught my attention because on this first Sunday of Lent, our Gospel lesson calls temptation to the forefront. Immediately following his Baptism, Jesus is led by the Spirit out into the wilderness where He will be tempted by the devil. Let's take a moment to reflect on that...Notice how the devil is trying to capitalize on this moment after Baptism when Jesus is revealed as God's son...This is the first time that God walks the earth in human form.

If you notice, the temptations put before Jesus were focused on the body, mind, and soul.

Jesus had been fasting for forty days and forty nights, and was famished. I suppose it was very clever for the devil to begin there, right? We all have our own physical bodies, imagine forty days and nights of hunger, illness, injury...we can appreciate how the needs of Jesus' physical body calling out for sustenance and attention.

And the devil comes along and says, "Turn these stones into bread."

Jesus resists and acknowledges that man cannot live by bread alone, but by the Word of God.

The next target of temptation was for the devil to try to activate the human guiles of Jesus' mind, the craftiness, the deceitfulness, the trickery, the self deception, and the devil tries to plant seeds of doubt, and says: "Throw yourself down from the heights of this pinnacle, for surely, *IF you are who you say you are*, then the angels will save you. You will not dash even one foot upon a stone."

Again, citing God's Word, Jesus resists, saying, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."

The devil continues: So, how about this? Consider, human God, stuck in this weak human body and mind, what are you willing to trade your soul for? If I were to give you all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor — if I were to satisfy the human lust for unchecked power, fame, fortune, control, would you be willing to turn away from your God and surrender your soul to me?

Really agitated now, Jesus says, "Away with you, Satan! Worship the Lord your God and serve only Him."

Unsuccessful at tempting Jesus' body, mind, and soul, the devil retreats and goes away.

What does all this mean for us, who are but mere humans, for we, too, are assaulted by many temptations that threaten our relationship with God and with each other.

The season of Lent offers opportunities to learn more about what these temptations are and how they affect us in this chapter of our lives. Lent also gives us opportunity to practice new habits that draw us closer to God and nurture our relationships with one another.

And, here is my Lenten disclaimer: Like anything else, though, we humans can take things too far.

No matter how faithful, hard-working, and obedient that we are, we can never be expected to live into the perfection of Jesus. After all, unlike Jesus, we are prone to sin. Even on our best days, we are not perfect. On many days, we find ourselves assaulted by many temptations that pose a threat to our body, mind, and soul. Including, the temptation towards blame and shame — directed at ourselves and others.

For many people, the story of Adam and Eve carries some baggage, and links the Original Sin with the burden of blame and shame.

Add to that, we live in a time where the “blame and shame” ideology is a little out of control. When things go wrong, or conflict is high, people

are quick to point out faults and issue blame to “the other.” Instead of leading to a solution, the issuance of blame has a different effect. It induces feelings of worthlessness or shame, and leads towards dehumanization, feelings of inadequacy, marginalization, and discrimination.

Instead of drawing people together in reconciliation, blame and shame create further division and exacerbate conflict. The same is true if we maintain a “blame and shame” approach to ourselves. Instead of reconciling us to God, it can lead to a sense of unworthiness and self-deprecation.

Blame and shame, directed inward or outward, is not helpful, and it is not rooted in God’s mercy and compassion. Instead, it draws us further away from righteousness and rejoicing.

We have a saying in the Busby house: “no blaming, no complaining, no excuses.”

It was a phrase I learned in the parent workshop at an elite basketball skills clinic.

“No blaming, no complaining, no excuses.”

The idea — in the basketball world — is that when you focus on blaming someone else (coaches, teammates, parents, referees), or when you complain about who you are blaming, or what you are blaming (conditions of the court), then you spend your time making excuses rather than focusing on what needs to be developed in your own game.

Whereas, if you focus on working hard on skill development, being a better teammate, or more coachable, you will become a better player. It's probably a good Lenten discipline too: “no blaming, no complaining, no excuses” can lead us towards practices that are faithful and productive, and away from habits that are degrading and destructive.

Lent is a time of intention and purpose. It is a holy time, and, if we choose to honor it as such, it can yield significant results. Lent can be a season of reflection, repentance, and renewal.

It is a time where we reflect on the temptations that assault us and lead us towards sin. (Sin, simply speaking, is anything that separates us from God.)

In repentance, we acknowledge our sins, and return our hearts to God, trusting in the One who is mighty to save, and merciful to all.

If we parse out the things that draw us away from God (in reflection) and return our hearts towards God (in repentance), we create space for us to learn and practice things that draw us closer. In the process, particularly if we can successfully implement “no blaming, no complaining, no excuses,” we are renewed — in body, in mind, in spirit, in community — and we are reconciled to God.

Yes, we are sinful creatures, prone to temptation, yet God is mighty to save. Yes, we are assaulted by many temptations, and yes, we are far from perfect. I pray this Lenten season may be filled with holiness, faithfulness, growth, and discovery for each and every one of us.

“No blaming, no complaining, no excuses.” Let’s get to the holy work of reflection, repentance and renewal. For our God is mighty to save, and the world needs a whole lot of saving.

Amen.