

# Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year C

## First Sunday in Lent

**First reading:** (Deuteronomy 26.4-10)

*A Wandering Aramaean*

The first readings during Lent each year are wonderfully arranged to lead us from the very beginnings to the immediate preparation for Christ, each Sunday working further forward in the history of God's promises to his People.

This year begins with the profession of faith about God's care of his People, which Israelite priests had to make when presenting their offering. Surprisingly, it begins not with the promises to Abraham but with the wanderings of the nomadic tribes down to Egypt. It was first in Egypt that God made them his people, rescuing them from slavery. In this version of the history of Israel, the decisive moment was not the call of Abraham but the exodus from Egypt.

But in following Sundays we will work forward through the call of Abraham, the call of Moses, the first Passover in Canaan and the promise of a New Covenant at the return from the Babylonian Exile. It is a record of God's constant care as he prepares the People for the coming of his Son at the incarnation, and the full revelation at the Cross and the Resurrection of Easter.

Question:

*In what sense are Christians still a Pilgrim People?*

**Second reading:** (Romans 10.8-13)

*Profession of Faith*

In these chapters of the Letter to the Romans, Paul is struggling with the problem of the salvation of the Jews: how is it that the People so carefully nurtured for so long should refuse to acknowledge that Jesus is the fulfilment of God's plan of salvation?

To Paul, himself a fervent Jew, it was agonizing that so many of his own people should refuse to acknowledge Jesus. But he saw that their refusal opened the door to the gentiles. The Christian community at Rome was composed of both Jews and gentiles. It was important for Paul to show that even scripture proclaims that the door is open to all who profess their faith in Christ, not one party to the exclusion of the other: so, no distinction between Jew and Greek.

This is, however, a very different profession of faith from the profession in the first reading: that was a belief in a Lord God who rescued from Egypt. This is a belief that the Lord God raised Jesus from the dead, and raised him to the status of Lord. Paul never uses the word 'God' of Jesus, but does call him by the special personal name so sacred that it is never pronounced in Hebrew. The word used then and now is 'LORD'.

Question:

*Is there any special reason why Christians should be concerned about the salvation of the Jews?*

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## **Gospel:**

*(Luke 4.1-13)*

### *Jesus is Tested in the Desert*

To remind us that Lent is a time when we are tested out, the gospel reading of the First Sunday of Lent is always about the testing of Jesus. Through our fasting, or whatever the extra little offering we make to the Lord during Lent may be, we enter into solidarity with the hardship undergone by Jesus in his Passion.

Of course, Lent is not a matter of testing out how far we can push ourselves (some sort of self-torture). Rather it is a period of preparation for the Passion and Resurrection, like the 40 years of Israel in the desert, preparing for the Promised Land, or the prophet Elijah's 40-day preparation, or the 40 days during which Christ prepared the apostles between Easter and the Ascension.

The point of Jesus' 40-day fast is to give some force to the devil's first taunt. To each of the devil's taunts Jesus replies with a word of scripture: if you rely on God's word you are unshakably safe, for God has created and arranged everything. Matthew and Luke have a different order for second and third temptations: Matthew climaxes with Jesus as the Second Moses, like Moses seeing all the territories from a high mountain. Luke ends the scene as he begins and ends his gospel, at Jerusalem, the turning point of the gospel.

## **Question:**

*If the Devil came to distract you from your Christian vocation, what would he/she dangle before you?*

*In the solitude of the desert, Jesus prayed to his Father. Do you find solitude helpful in prayer?*

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