

# Lent I

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[ 0 : 00 ] Then it was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness. Words from this morning's holy gospel in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.

Amen. Life is a crucible. Life is the place where all we believe, all we know, experience, and do is forged together by heat and hammering into the making of, well, the making of ourselves.

Life is our time of probation before God's watchful eye. Our eternal destiny lies in the outcome. What we do with our life matters.

We don't like to think about life in this way. We prefer to think we have control. We prefer to think of the world as a place to relax and enjoy.

Some look for heaven on earth. That's not realistic. After the fall, God told Adam, Because thou wast eaten of the tree, cursed is the ground for thy sake.

[ 1 : 14 ] And sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life. And the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread. To thou return unto the ground.

God then drove Adam and Eve out of the garden to toil and sweat, Knowing evil and feeling pain. From that day forward, life became a crucible.

With a fallen nature, man cannot forge his own way back to Eden. No, God has to forge that way for him. And he has.

Through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In Christ, and only in Christ, Is there a way back to Eden. But it is a narrow way.

It is a way that includes a cross. In Matthew chapter 7, verse 14, Jesus says, Straight is the gate, And narrow is the way that leads to life.

[ 2 : 22 ] And few there be that find it. Then in Matthew 10, 38, he says, He that takes not his cross and follows after me Is not worthy of me.

To be worthy of Eden, We must follow after Jesus along his narrow way, Carrying a cross. Not his cross.

Our own cross. We must be forged for his glory In the crucible of life. In this morning's epistle, St. Paul describes the crucible as he knew it.

The way back to Eden for him was forged Through patience, afflictions, Necessities, and distresses. He experienced being beaten and imprisoned.

He experienced tumults and labor. He fasted. He prayed. He was purified in his knowledge of God By the Holy Spirit.

[ 3 : 30 ] He was dishonored. He was spoken evil of and chastened. He was made sorrowful and poor. Eventually, his way back to Eden included a martyr's death.

But that was okay for St. Paul. For as he told the Philippians, For me to live is Christ, And to die is gain. He said, I count all things but loss For the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, For whom I have suffered the loss of all things.

And here is why. That I may know him, And the power of his resurrection, And the fellowship of his sufferings, Be made conformable to his death.

That if by any means, I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. St. Paul was willingly forged In the crucible of life For God's glory.

And he used it all, All that it brought upon him, To make his way in Christ, Back to Eden. Our way back to Eden Will not be exactly the same as St. Paul's.

[ 4 : 53 ]     It may include some similar components, But it will be the way God wants it to be for us. Are we willing to be forged for his glory?

In 1 John 2, verses 15-17, The apostle warns, Love not the world, Neither the things that are in the world. For all that is in the world, The lust of the flesh, And the lust of the eyes, And the pride of life, Is not of the Father, But is of the world.

And the world passes away, And the lust thereof. But he that does the will of God, Abides forever. If we want to make our way back to Eden, We must do battle Against the lust of the flesh, The lust of the eyes, And the pride of life.

Just the way Jesus did In this morning's gospel lesson. Satan tempted Jesus with the lust of the flesh When he tried to entice Jesus To turn stones into bread, To turn stones into bread, He tempted Jesus with the lust of the eyes, When he challenged Jesus To take power over all the kingdoms of the world, Before the Father's appointed time.

He tempted Jesus with the pride of life, When he tried to coach Jesus To throw himself off the temple pinnacle, So the angels would rescue him.

[ 6 : 25 ]     Jesus withstood all three perfectly, Making the way for us To withstand them consistently. But we must fight as he fought, The same way that he fought, With it is written.

Striving against these three Will increase the heat, It will increase the pressure we feel In the crucible of life. The world, the flesh, and the devil Will relentlessly crash upon us Like ocean waves in a storm, Trying to erode our faith in Christ.

And yet, in Christ, We can remain faithful. We must remain faithful. If that is, We want to make our way back to Eden.

We know what the Via Dolorosa is. It is the path that Jesus trod From Pilate's court to Golgotha. In English, it translates to Way of grief.

Way of sorrow. Or painful way. It wound through the narrow streets Of Jerusalem. It was a way filled with ups and downs And ultimately, A climb to the summit of Mount Calvary.

[ 7 : 47 ]     This is the narrow path Jesus is calling you and I To follow. Not the broad way That many follow, But the narrow way That few follow.

The way that follows him. Like Jesus who fell three times Under the weight of his cross Carried for our sins Along the Via Dolorosa, We will fall under the weight Of our cross too.

But like him, An invitation of him, Filled with the grace And the power of his Holy Spirit, We must get up And keep walking The way.

True, Death is waiting for us At the top of that way. Death to ourselves, To our pride, To our ego, To our passions.

But it has to be that way, For that is the only way back To Eden. To the Galatians, St. Paul exclaimed, I am crucified with Christ.

[ 8 : 57 ]     Nevertheless, I live. Yet not I, But Christ lives in me. And the life Which I now live In the flesh, I live by the faith Of the Son of God Who loved me And gave himself For me.

Is this our spiritual desire? As this Lent begins? Are we being crucified With Christ? Are we living By the faith Of the crucified Son of God?

What Jesus is offering To us Is what he offered To St. Paul And what he offers To all who are baptized Into him.

He's offering himself The way, The truth, And the life. He is inviting us To follow him. May we accept His invitation.

And no matter What we may encounter Along our way Back to Eden, May we be willing To keep walking That narrow way, Battling As Jesus battled, Getting up When we fall, In order to be Conformed Unto his death And be found In him.

[ 10 : 20 ] Yes, My brothers and sisters, Life is a crucible. Yet if we follow The narrow way Of Jesus, The Via Dolorosa, The way Of the cross, It will lead us Back to heaven And our eternal life In Eden.

In the name of The Father, With the Son, And with the Holy Ghost. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.