

Lent II

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[0:00] Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness, to be tempted by the devil, and he fasted for forty days and forty nights.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. Have you ever noticed how every temptation our Lord experienced in this morning's gospel was preparing him for something else he would later experience on the cross?

For in this morning's gospel, when the devil sees that our Lord is hungry, he offers our Lord stones for food. And similarly, upon the cross, when the soldiers see that our Lord is thirsty, they offer him vinegar for drink.

And in this morning's gospel, the devil tells our Lord, if you truly are the Son of God, throw yourself down. And similarly, upon the cross, our Lord will be told, if you truly are the Son of God, throw yourself down and come off that cross.

And in this morning's gospel, the devil shows our Lord all the kingdoms of the world and says, all these I will give to you if you will fall down and worship me.

[1:25] And similarly, upon the cross, our Lord continues to deny all earthly pomp and pleasure, seeking only to fulfill his Heavenly Father's will and only to serve God alone.

For again, every temptation, every temptation our Lord experienced while out in the wilderness, at the very start of his ministry, was preparing our Lord for something he would later on experience in life.

And friends, that's Lent. That is what Lent does. It is 40 days of fasting, self-denial, and prayer that is meant to strengthen us and prepare us for whatever in life is coming next.

And a big part of life is suffering. And if you haven't found that out yet, well, just wait, because you will.

For the people of God are not immune from suffering. In fact, that's kind of Holy Scripture 101.

[2:45] After all, Adam and Eve suffered. And so did all the children of Israel. And so did all the patriarchs and prophets.

And so did Mary and Joseph and John the Baptist, as well as all of the apostles. They all suffered. And even Jesus Christ, God's perfect, sinless, and obedient son.

He suffered. So what makes us think that our lives would be any different? For again, suffering is just a part of life.

So if we're all going to suffer, then I suppose we should try to learn how to suffer well. And that's what Lent teaches us.

For throughout Lent, we endure just a little bit of suffering now, so that later on in life, when a much larger or unforeseen amount of suffering comes, we might not lose hope, but actually persevere.

[4:02] At least that's what Romans chapter 5, verse 1 through 5 tells us. For in Romans chapter 5, St. Paul explains that suffering produces perseverance.

Perseverance, character. And character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

For a person who does not know how to suffer well is often also a person who has lost all hope. And I should know.

Years ago, and I will not get into specifics, and I kindly ask you not to inquire, but years ago, I experienced something in my life that I naively thought I would never, ever experience.

For years ago, everything I had ever worked for in my past, and everything I had ever hoped for in my future, was gone.

[5 : 16] It was all gone. And I was broken. And every single part of me, my mind, my body, my soul, hurt.

At which point, a friend of mine actually said to me, and this is a quote, partner, you suffer just like someone who's never learned a single thing from Lent.

And I knew exactly what he meant. Because at that time, I was suffering, but I was suffering like someone who had no hope.

Because I had placed most of my hope in the wrong things, as many often do. For whether it is a stable job, a stable government, good health, good friends, a loving spouse, or simply four walls and a roof over your head, if you are putting your hope in anything other than Jesus Christ, you will suffer, but you will suffer in a way that you never thought possible before.

For again, suffering is simply a part of life. And as the good Lord tells us, it rains on the just and the unjust alike.

[6 : 52] But rather than put our trust in an umbrella, Lent teaches us how to endure the rain. For the purpose of Lent is not to shield us from suffering, or even to minimize our suffering, or even to add to our suffering.

No, the purpose of Lent is to teach us how to endure, to strengthen us. And it strengthens us by teaching us not to lay up for ourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but to lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

For that, that is the lesson our Lord learned when the Holy Spirit led him out into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And that is the same Spirit-filled wilderness experience that prepared our Lord and strengthened him for all those difficult days that lied ahead.

Therefore, by God's grace, may our Lord's 40 days of fasting now become our 40 days of fasting so that we might learn not only how to suffer, but how to suffer in Christ.

So that in the absence of a few earthly treasures, we may still lay hold of that one eternal treasure that will never, ever disappoint.

[8 : 34] And that is our dear Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who is heaven's greatest treasure and the earth's only hope.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.