

Notes for Next Sunday

First Sunday in Lent

The Point of this Week's Readings

Old Testament (Genesis 22:1-18). The climax of Abraham's life of faith comes when he who loves his son so much is willing to offer him as a sacrifice to his Lord. Surely Abraham finds great relief when God provides the ram in the thicket. Often we fail tests of faith that do not begin to compare to Abraham's. Thankfully, there was an even greater sacrifice when God the Father in heaven offered the sacrifice of His beloved Son to secure forgiveness for our failures.

Epistle (James 1:12-18). James writes to struggling Christians who are facing many trials and temptations. Those who face such challenges may be tossed about and eventually destroyed by sin. Those who seek God's wisdom endure trials and become stronger. In Baptism, God gives His struggling children the crown of life not because of their strength but because of His grace. In that grace, we can follow Him and live confidently in this world of struggles and uncertainty.

Gospel (Mark 1:9-15). In verses 9-11 the Father declares Jesus is His Son as the Spirit descends on Jesus. Jesus' status as God's Son makes Him a target of Satan's assaults. This same dynamic continues in the lives of God's children today, as Satan does all that he can to tempt the baptized. Yet, our own Baptism joins us to Christ and clothes us with His righteousness. In verses 12-13 we see Jesus' successful struggle against temptation in the wilderness prefigures His final victory at the cross over our ancient foe. From the days of Adam and Eve, we have continuously fallen into Satan's traps. Jesus, after uniting Himself with fallen humans through Baptism, won a preliminary victory over the evil foe's temptations. At the cross, Jesus gained an even more wonderful victory for us. His resurrection proves that Satan cannot prevail. In verses 14-15 on the one hand, Jesus' message sounds much like the message of John and the prophets. On the other hand, the arrival of the Messiah fulfills prophecy and ushers in a new era. The Church's message today has the same combination of new and old. True, it focuses on the age-old problem of sin and human failure. However, the Gospel delivers the forgiveness of sins and with it the hope of an eternal future with God.

For more in-depth commentary on each reading, read the notes found after each text below.

OLD TESTAMENT – Genesis 22:1-18

Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. ² Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about." ³ Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. ⁴ On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. ⁵ He said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you." ⁶ Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, ⁷ Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, "Father?" "Yes, my son?" Abraham replied. "The fire and wood are here," Isaac said, "but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" ⁸ Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together. ⁹ When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰ Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his

son.¹¹ But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!” “Here I am,” he replied.¹² “Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.”¹³ Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son.¹⁴ So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, “On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.”¹⁵ The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time¹⁶ and said, “I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son,¹⁷ I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies,¹⁸ and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.”

22:1 *tested*. † Not “tempted,” for God does not tempt (Jas 1:13). Satan tempts us (see 1Co 7:5) in order to make us fall; God tests us in order to strengthen our faith and commitment (CSB)

22:3 *Early the next morning*. After what must have been a sleepless night Abraham go up early,, perhaps so he wouldn’t have to discuss with Sarah the gruesome assignment ahead of him. (PBC)

22:4 *third day*. Abraham had a fifty mile trip ahead of him. God didn’t want Abraham’s obedience to flow from spur-of-the moment enthusiasm. Three days of traveling gave Abraham plenty of time to think. And we can sure Satan supplied a dozen logical reasons why he should not take the life of his son. (PBC)

22:5 *boy*. Isaac must have been a strong teenager, perhaps 13 years old (cf. 17:25) to be able to carry a large load of wood uphill. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 2)

22:8 *God himself will provide the lamb*. The question Isaac asks in verse seven must have cut Abraham life a knife. His answer was a combination of considerate love, which spared Isaac the brutal details, and of confident faith, which left the outcome to God. (PBC)

22:9 *laid him on the altar, on top of the wood*. Isaac is here a type (prefiguration) of Christ. (CSB)

22:14 *will provide*. This was Abraham’s expression of joy and praise. God sees His own in their anguish and provides for them. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 2)

22:17 *sand on the seashore*. Fulfilled, at least in part, during Solomon’s reign (see 1Ki 4:20). (CSB)

EPISTLE – James 1:12-18

¹² Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. ¹³ When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; ¹⁴ but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. ¹⁵ Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. ¹⁶ Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers. ¹⁷ Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. ¹⁸ He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

1:12 *WHO PERSEVERES* – This is the same quality that Jesus praises and rewards in each of the seven letters in Revelation chapters 2 and 3. All believers need to grow in this kind of spiritual toughness, because we are under daily assault from Satan. (PBC)

1:12 *crown*. Symbol of eternal life with God. Parallels “perfect and complete” (v 4). (TLSB)

1:13 tempted. Luther: “[God] does not test in order that we may fear and hate Him like a tyrant but to the end that He may exercise and stir up faith and love in us. Satan, however, tempts for evil, in order to draw you away from God and to make you distrust and blaspheme God” (AE 4:132). (TLSB)

1:14 by his own evil desire. Our temptation problem is not from God but really comes from within: cooking away in each person’s heart is a sinful self that will never be converted. It restlessly seeks to dominate our thinking and values. (PBC)

1:16 Do not be deceived. Deception comes from the world, which has rejected God. This is best understood as the conclusion of vv 13–15, not the beginning of a new paragraph. (TLSB)

1:17 Father of ... lights. God is the Creator of the heavenly bodies, which give light to the earth, but, unlike them, he does not change. (CSB)

1:18 firstfruits. Just as the first sheaf of the harvest was an indication that the whole harvest would eventually follow, so the early Christians were an indication that a great number of people would eventually be born again. (CSB)

GOSPEL – Mark 1:9-15

⁹ At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.” ¹² At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert, ¹³ and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him. ¹⁴ After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ¹⁵ “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!”

1:9 At that time. Jesus probably began his public ministry c. A.D. 27, when he was approximately 30 years old (Lk 3:23). As far as we know, he had spent most of his previous life in Nazareth. (CSB)

1:10 immediately. Occurs 41 times in Mark but only 10 additional times in the rest of the NT. It underlines both the urgency of Jesus’ ministry and His march toward the cross. (TLSB)

1:10 heaven torn open. What happened was an act of God, that great act by which he inaugurated Jesus into his mighty office of Prophet, High Priest, and King. (Buls)

1:10 like a dove. Symbolizing the gentleness, purity and guilelessness of the Holy Spirit. (CSB)

1:12 the Spirit sent him. The spiritual dove of peace that landed on Jesus in his baptism now becomes the spiritual hawk of war, as the Spirit send Jesus into combat with the devil. God takes the initiative; he sends his Son to war that he might overthrow the tyrant of hell. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 13, Part 2)

1:13 The locale of the temptation is significant in light of the OT narratives with which it compares and contrasts. First, in *contrast* to Adam, who was tempted in a paradise garden, the Second Adam is tempted in a barren desert. Second, in *comparison* with the Israelites, who sojourned 40 years in the wilderness as punishment for their rebellion, Christ remains 40 days in the wilderness. Unlike Adam and Israel, however, Christ (the Second Adam and Israel reduced to one) remains faithful to the Word of his Father, and in so doing, earns salvation for all humanity and constitutes a new Israel (i.e., his church). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 13, Part 2)

1:13 wild animals. In Jesus' day there were many more wild animals—including lions—in Palestine than today. Only Mark reports their presence in this connection; he emphasizes that God kept Jesus safe in the desert. (CSB)

1:13 angels attended him. Ministering angels contrast sharply with Satan, the fallen angel who brings temptation rather than help. (TLSB)

1:15 The “kingdom” is the rule, or reign, of God. The Kingdom was present then as Jesus stood proclaiming—in authority. It is present now as Jesus' ascension has him sitting at God's right hand ruling, particularly on behalf of the Church. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 1)