

Lent Reflection: Living on God's Word.



*The aim of this resource is to focus attention on the Lenten scripture: Jesus's Temptation in the Desert. The resource supports **The Year of the Word; The God Who Speaks** and is designed to be used during an assembly or within a school liturgy, with or without slides.*

I want to begin this time together by just appreciating the stillness. Let's just sit a while in silence and relax.

Do you ever notice how busy a world we live in? How quickly we move about our day? How much there is to think about? It can all become a bit overwhelming. It's easy to feel stressed, anxious, uncertain.

Over the last few years scientific studies have evidenced the benefits of being still and silent. Making time for silence and stillness reduces the chemicals inside us that cause tension and increases our brain's capacity to remember, focus and learn.

Many people have their own quiet places where they can seek out stillness and silence. Some of you will. It might be your bedroom, the chapel in school or in your local park. These places might be especially important in times of change or when big decisions need to be made.

The Gospel we hear in church on the first Sunday of Lent, tells us that Jesus was also drawn to a quiet place just before he stepped into his public mission. Can you remember where this was? The desert.

For the Jewish people in Jesus's day, the desert was a place associated with searching and questioning. The solitude and lack of distractions there helped a person focus on what was important. In the desert a person could be alone with God, listen to his voice, and discern God's plan for them.

The Gospels tell us that Jesus spent forty days in the desert, pondering over the words of scripture he had learned while growing up. Unsurprisingly at the end of his forty days, when Jesus was tested by the devil, his responses were founded on scripture. He'd let God's words shape him and understood how they help us live life to the full.

That's why the Church encourages us to listen to and read scripture carefully, especially in Lent, pondering over words and phrases that stand out for us personally. When we study them, as Jesus did, we allow God's words to inspire and guide us. Let's look at the account of Jesus's time in the desert to understand this more.

Read the first paragraph from page 3 or click in PowerPoint to reveal first paragraph of scripture.

Question 1: In the first test, the devil, knowing Jesus was hungry, urges Jesus to turn stones into bread. Turn to your neighbours and briefly discuss with them what you would have done if you were in Jesus's place.

There could be many things you've just shared with your neighbours. But imagine a world where you couldn't share your thoughts with anyone. A world where there was no way to communicate. Not even to your friends and family. You have food, drink, shelter, so you could survive; but would you really be living? Chatting, laughing, listening, offloading, these things build relationships, and relationships make us feel alive.

In the Gospel paragraph we've just heard, Jesus reminds us that the greatest relationship offered to us is with God, through whom **all things** live. But he reminds us too that to build this relationship we need to let God speak to us through scripture and then, in turn, to share our thoughts with God in prayer.

Question for quiet reflection: How often do we do this? Could we aim to do this more during Lent?

In his second test, the devil tries to use scripture to justify his bad intentions.

Read the second paragraph from page 3 or click in PowerPoint to reveal second paragraph of scripture.

Question 2: Read over the paragraph and consider what you think is bad about the devil's test.

Because scripture leaves room for interpretation there is seldom one answer. That's why it's a good thing to read scripture together, reflect on what it is saying to you, find out what the Church teaches about the passage, then share perspectives. But one thing the devil's challenge reveals, is how tempting it is to allow other voices to drown out God's word. In the Gospel, the devil hoped his voice would be louder than God's. For us, other voices pose the same risk too.

Question for quiet reflection: Are there times when the guidance we get through scripture, like honouring our bodies, gets drowned out by social media or our peers?

Jesus doesn't fall into the devil's trap. He knows to hear God's voice above all else. But in fairness to us, in the desert he's not distracted by phones, shops and reality TV. That's not to say that the world Jesus would return to didn't have distractions. Jesus lived near busy trading ports and in a country ruled by Roman emperors and rich kings. The people in Jesus's day were tempted by status and possessions in the same way we are. The devil knew this and that is why his third test is this.

Read the third paragraph from page 3 or click in PowerPoint to reveal third paragraph of scripture.

Question: Read over the paragraph and consider what you think is bad about the Devil's offer. We live in society where wanting more is encouraged, so it can't be that dangerous, can it?

Jesus's response to the devil is clear, we must worship and serve God first. If we lose sight of this, if stuff and status become our priority, then we start to distance ourselves from what is really important.

As the Gospel suggests, we might as well be at the top of a high mountain because being able to **really** connect with others becomes more difficult. Our attention is not solely on people and their value as children of God, but on what they have or don't have, and on what we have and want next. We start to lose the ability to be satisfied and grateful for the gifts God has given us; even the greatest gift – life.

One teenager grateful for this gift is 17-year-old Vincent. Vincent was born with HIV and over the years has watched many friends die because of the virus. But Vincent considers himself blessed, because from birth he's been looked after and loved by three dedicated religious sisters at St John's Care Centre in South Africa. In an interview with Missio, a charity that helps fund St John's, Vincent said; "If I'd not come here my life would have been totally different. Every day I wake up I thank God for my life."

Vincent believes that the encouragement and guidance he gains from scripture inspires him to appreciate the life he has and to use it to help others, whether that's supporting a friend or being on his school council. When asked if Vincent had a message for young people in England and Wales, he said, "I'd like to thank them for all the support they give us through Missio and to encourage them to listen to the Word of God."

Inspired by Vincent and by the lessons Jesus teaches us through his responses to the devil, let's conclude by thinking of what we can do to draw closer to God and listen carefully to his word this Lent.

Questions for quiet reflection: *Click to reveal on PowerPoint. Then click again to reveal closing prayer.*

- At the start of this reflection we heard about the importance of quiet places. If you don't yet have one, find somewhere you can be still and silent. If you do, commit to spending time there this Lent.
- Make an effort to read a few verses of scripture every day/week (the Gospels are a great place to start) and reflect on what God might be saying to you through his words.
- Remember that Lent is also a time of almsgiving. Give in support of Missio and help more young people like Vincent to live life to the full.

A reading from the Gospel of Matthew 4:1-11

Jesus was led by the Spirit out into the desert to be put to the test by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, after which he was hungry, and the tester came and said to him, 'If you are Son of God, tell these stones to turn into loaves.' But Jesus replied, 'Scripture says: Human beings live not on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'

The devil then took him to the holy city and set him on the parapet of the Temple. 'If you are Son of God,' he said, 'throw yourself down; for scripture says: He has given his angels orders about you, and they will carry you in their arms in case you trip over a stone.' Jesus said to him, 'Scripture also says: Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'

Next, taking him to a very high mountain, the devil showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. And he said to him, 'I will give you all these, if you fall at my feet and worship me.' Then Jesus replied, 'Away with you, Satan! For scripture says: The Lord your God is the one to whom you must worship, him alone you must serve.'

Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels appeared and looked after him.

The Gospel of the Lord



Official Prayer for The Year of the Word

Living God, you walk alongside us and speak to us throughout the Scriptures.
Your Son, Jesus Christ, listens to our hopes and fears
and shows us how to live for one another.
Send us the Holy Spirit to open our hearts and minds
so that we may be your witnesses throughout the world.
Amen.

Notes for teachers / support staff

We are conscious that time is limited in assemblies but should there be opportunity for students to share responses to questions 1 & 2, below we have added further explanation.

Question 1: What the Gospel is telling us is that obeying the word of God is the most important thing in life - even more important than satisfying our physical needs. Jesus knew that succumbing to the devil would divert him from what God wanted for him and that our security does not come from our possessions but from God alone.

Question 2: Jesus had already shown the devil that he could accept physical suffering if it meant obeying God. This time the devil tests Jesus' trust in God: the angels will take care of him so that he will not dash his foot against a stone (Ps. 91:11,12).

But the devil is quoting scripture out of context, does not believe it and does not follow it. So Jesus' response is apt: "It is also written, 'You shall not put the LORD your God to the test.'" (Deuteronomy, 6:16). When someone puts God to the test, they reveal that they do not trust God. Jesus does not need dramatic events to prove his trust; nor will he be foolhardy and take unnecessary risks just to discover if it is true.