Grace and peace are yours from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, amen.

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, following our festival on Shrove Tuesday where we ate, drank, and made merry in our Fellowship Hall. We celebrated a tradition that ushers us into a time of forty days; the Season of Lent. The question of what to do (or not do) during the forty days of Lent can be a source of great debate and discussion. Remember, the Catholic Church that exists today is the first organized church formed by the very apostles that Jesus sent into the world. As the church formed doctrine and policy, many traditions were established that are not biblical in nature, but created as the means to remember what God has done for us through His only Son, Jesus Christ.

A common element we consider during Lent is to ‘not eat meat on Friday.’ This is a practice that was first instituted in the First Century, and later became Canon Law. Today the Catholic Church retains this law for members, but not only during Lent, but every week throughout the year. If a person decides to not observe this practice, it is assumed they will make another sacrifice, charitable contribution, or other penance in its place. Now, there are exceptions to the law and are subject to local economies, customs, and cultures. One exception (in the U.S.) is the Friday after Thanksgiving, where this is an abundance of left-over meat. A similar exception applies when St. Patrick Day (which is always in Lent) falls on a Wednesday or Friday.

Finally, traditions of eating fish on Friday during Lent grew in popularity across America when restaurants were able to provide an economic meal to working families. Fr. Daren Zehnle quotes John Myre with an explanation as to why we eat fish instead of meat: “For when God, for Adam’s sin, cursed the earth and the land, he cursed not the water; wherefore it is lawful for a man to eat in Lent that which cometh of the water.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Biblically, we are not told to not eat meat on any specific day of the week. Furthermore, to give up something for Lent is not required or expected. However, any act that we engage with (personally) to remember what our Lord has done is appropriates; as long as the focus remains on what Christ did (and not what we did). Enough of the early church history that influences our motivations today.

Our gospel text today is the condensed version of our Lord’s ministry: He was baptized, tempted in the wilderness, and thereafter spread the good news. While this is absolutely true, the details are left to the other gospel writers. After the Baptism of Jesus, the Spirit lead Him into the wilderness where He was tempted by Satan. In Matthew’s Gospel, Satan does not appear to Jesus until He had gone for forty days and forty nights without eating; Satan appear when Jesus is famished and vulnerable. Three times Jesus is tempted, and three times Jesus is strengthened for obedience to the will of the Father.

There is a huge question, like an elephant in the room, when it comes to the temptations of Christ. There are no witnesses to the events that Jesus encountered and endured during the time in the Wilderness. For that matter, if there are no witnesses, how did the events become part of the Bible? Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record the temptations with varied degrees of detail, but none were there; none were called as disciples until after Jesus comes out of the Wilderness.

Even if the events in the Wilderness events are not witnessed, do we really need to question what Satan tempted Jesus with? Our Lord Jesus Christ is completely human and completely divine. Only God can provide the perfect sacrifice for sin, so Jesus must be divine. To be credible as human, Jesus must endure the same elements, conditions, and trials we do. The three temptations that Jesus is presented with come AFTER He has fasted. Why did He fast? Because God led the Hebrews into the Wilderness for forty years where He alone provided them with food; Manna, the bread of Heaven. Jesus fasts for forty days as God alone provides for Him.

Back to the temptations and the humanity of our Lord. After not eating for forty days, Jesus will need to resume eating, which He does. But the conditions and timing of consuming food will not be by miraculous nature; it will be within the human boundaries of obtaining food. Satan knows the power of God and pain of human life. So, the plea from Satan to eat and satisfy the hunger comes as an attack to both the divine and human nature. Satan is expressing to God to have mercy on a human life that is struggling and starving. Jesus is not going to ask, and God is not going to treat His Son differently than you and me.

Jesus overcomes the temptation by speaking the Word of God, which is His strength and support. “It is written that man shall not live by bread alone.” Then comes the second temptation, to have power and control over all the nations of the world. What is the target of this attack? Satan knows that God is over things in this world and the next; Satan knows that he himself is subject to God. The target of this temptation is to place Jesus in the human image of a King over nations that cannot be defeated. Satan is proposing the literal restoration of the Davidic Kingdom that will make Israel a world power, “if”, Jesus will bow to him. Jesus ushers in the Kingdom of God with humble and obedient service to God alone; and unlike an earthly kingdom, His Kingdom will last forever.

The final temptation is Satan urging the Lord to ‘prove who He is.’ Throw yourself from the pinnacle of the temple and the angels will protect you… In other words, reveal yourself and show the world who you really are. We hear many time that Satan and demons know who Jesus is; His identity is not hidden or veiled from the immortal world, but only the human world. Satan is suggesting that Jesus show the world His true identity, which is not how God intends salvation to come to the world.

Collectively the three temptations are to attack the humanity of Jesus; to reveal that no human will be able to live a life of obedient service to God the Father. Satan knows his power over human life and believes that he will have the same power over Jesus. Again, completely human and completely divine, Jesus will indeed accomplish all things that are the will of God for our salvation and our place in His forever presence. Jesus is God and will not use divine measures as an advantage in living human life. Jesus lays aside all honor, glory, and power to fulfill the words of the Law and Prophets and become the holy sacrifice that is the authority that defeats sin and death.

Even though the temptations of Christ are not witnessed by humans, it is a documented encounter between Jesus and Satan for our understanding. Jesus endures and experiences all the same trials and temptations, challenges and sorrows that we do. Furthermore, Our Lord will be tempted just as we are tempted to look for strength in this world, instead of relying, depending, and trusting in God for the peace that passes all understanding to keep our hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord. Amen.

1. https://ct.dio.org/item/4950-hey-father-why-do-catholics-eat-fish-on-fridays-and-when-did-this-start.html [↑](#footnote-ref-1)