

## LENT I

*Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.*

Most beloved in God, originally the forty days of the Lenten fast was counted from this Sunday. Since the fourth century St. John at the Lateran Gate has been the “stational church” or the site of the Pope’s Mass on this, the first Sunday in Lent. It is the patriarchal basilica of the Bishop of Rome, and was first consecrated to “Saint Savior”: it was the first Christian church to be built as such following the edict of Milan in 313 AD when Christianity was legalized by imperial command. Built by the Emperor Constantine from his own money and on his own property, it was and remains the principal church of all Christianity; its very name reminds us of the salvation accomplished by Our Blessed Redeemer, and all this sets the tone for Roman Catholics in their observance of Lent.

Immediately after His Baptism in the Jordan River our Lord began to prepare for His public ministry by a fast of forty days in the desert wasteland which stretches from Jericho to the mountains of Judea. In that appalling wilderness He was tempted by Satan who wanted to know whether this son of Mary was in reality the Son of God.

As the devil had done with Adam, he first directed His attack on Jesus through the senses. Our Lord was extremely hungry, and so the Evil One suggested that He turn the stones into bread. *In this same way*, he will try throughout these forty days to make each of us abandon the fasting and mortification we have undertaken in atonement for our sins and the quelling of our passions. This temptation appeals immediately to the our weak and wounded wills so ready to yield to the passions of our fallen flesh.

Satan promised Adam and Eve that they would be like God himself if only they ate of the forbidden tree. With the Lord Jesus, the Evil One took Him to the pinnacle of the Temple and tried to induce Him to cast Himself down, that the angels would save Him, and this to the praise of the crowd below. So too this demon seduces us in our worldly pride, so opposed to the spirit of prayer and meditation of God’s divine truths.

Finally, just as he had promised Adam know-ledge which was like that of God Himself – that he should know all things – Satan told Jesus he would make Him ruler of all the world if He would but fall down and worship him. So too the devil prompts us to lust after material things instead of doing good to our neighbor by giving alms and performing

works of charity. This constitutes the concupiscence of our hearts and stinginess of avarice.

But *Christ's* fasting and temptation was to demonstrate to us the need for us to follow the dictates of *right reason* over the shallowness which lies in the attraction to sin. *His* was the victory of life over death: slay the Evil One He used the bright sword of revelation found in Holy Scripture. He quoted from the 90<sup>th</sup> psalm, which we just chanted together in the tract – and this is the theme found throughout today's Mass and Divine Office: "His truth" – the truth of God – "will cover thee with a shield," says King David. This psalm is the ideal of holy Lent, that focused time of warfare against Satan and our passions. "He hath given His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways." This verse occurs daily at Vespers as a refrain throughout the whole of this long fast. As I said the whole psalm made up today's tract; and various of its verses constitute today's introit, gradual, and communion verse. The offertory – normally made up of a single psalm verse – today has three, all taken from Psalm 90. These three verses represent the triumph of Christ over the threefold temptations revealed in today's Gospel reading.

Side by side with Psalm 90 is today's epistle reading which emphasizes one of the characteristic notes of Lent. St. Paul borrows a text from Isaiah, "In an accepted time have I heard thee, and in the day of salvation have I helped thee." "Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold now is the day of salvation."

St Leo the Great, in commenting on this text, says, "Although there is no season of the year which is not rich in divine gifts and in which we, by God's grace do not find immediate access to His mercy, nevertheless at this time when Sunday summons us to fulfill all the duties of Christian piety, the souls of Christians must be stirred with more zeal for spiritual progress and possessed of very great confidence in almighty God. In this manner with pure souls and bodies we shall celebrate this mystery of the Lord's Passion, sublime beyond all others. True, we ought always to be in the Divine presence just as much as on the Easter feast. But because this spiritual vigor is possessed by only a few, while on one hand weakness of flesh leads any severe observance to be relaxed, and, on the other, the various occupations of this life share and divide our hearts, it necessarily happens that the dust of this world soils the hearts of even religious themselves. This divine institution [Lent] has been planned with great profit to our salvation so that these 40 days may help us regain the purity of our souls, making up in a way for the faults of the rest of the year, by fasting and pious deeds. However, we must be careful to give no one

the least cause of complaint or scandal, *so that our general behavior may not be inconsistent with our fasting and penance. For it is useless to reduce the nourishment of the body, except that the soul depart from sin.*"

My beloved children in Christ, indeed now **is** the acceptable time, now **is** the day of salvation. Let us, like Christ, take up the bright armor of God's truth and resist all the temptations of Sa-tan. Let us maintain our Lenten rule of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, and "lest our behavior be inconsistent with our penance," let us act with true chastity and genuine charity, conforming ourselves to Christ, as St. Paul admonishes. Let us persevere in our Lenten penance with longsuffering and sweetness, knowing that the goal is none other than the eternal Easter of heaven's divine glory.