**Lent: 40 Days of Exodus**

**Lectio Divina: 1st Sunday of Lent, Year A**

*By Monsignor Francesco Follo*

PARIS, March 07, 2014 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org/?utm_campaign=dailyhtml&utm_medium=email&utm_source=dispatch)) - ***1)  Lent: 40 Days of exodus***[***[1]***](https://br-mg5.mail.yahoo.com/neo/launch?.rand=ca85rhmhsdt3b#_ftn1)***to go to the Promised Land***.

      As suggested by today’s liturgy (the first Sunday of Lent) the right way to take part in Lent is to remember and relive what it was like for Him the 40 days of prayer and fasting spent in the desert and that ended with the passing of three tests.

     In the narration that Jesus did ​​for his disciples, the three temptations, which summarize this time of trial, let quite clearly understand that, in a battle that foreshadowed his agony, He chose the love of the Father and the charity for us and started drinking the cup of the New Covenant, which He would have then sealed with his offering on the Cross.

     This love offered and refused is already presented in the first reading, taken from the book of Genesis that shows us that man is dust shaped by the "creative hands" of God and animated by His breath of life and mercy. A few lines later, the book of Genesis presents the tragedy of wrong choices in front of good and evil, an evil that is born in the heart of man, from his choices, his refusals and his stubbornness in using his own criteria instead of those of God. We are asked to reflect on the seriousness of the refusal to fit into God's plan demanding absolute autonomy in deciding what is good and what is bad. It is the claim to be the equal of God, to be God to ourselves and to others.

     Then, in the second reading taken from the Letter to the Romans, we see that St. Paul refers to the narration of Genesis and compares the behaviors of Adam and of Christ and the results of their actions. The rebellion and disobedience of the first caused the separation from God and the death of all men, the perfect obedience of Christ, on the other hand, has obtained fullness of grace and of life for all. Adam and Eve experiment that their presumption has taken them away from each other, from the creation and from God.  Jesus repairs this tear and cancels this gap.

     Finally, the passage from the Gospel of Matthew that is offered to us today as the third reading, presents the same temptation of Adam and Eve, but shows how Jesus is victorious and points out the way to live a life faithful to God and free from the profound evil that threatens us.

     The devil puts into question the fact that Jesus is the son of God (" *If you are the Son of God ..."*) which had been established at the time of his baptism on the banks of the Jordan River. In fact the temptation concerns neither bread neither material things but how to live our relationship with things, with people and with God. We can live as children of God like Jesus, or reject the loving fatherhood of God who offers a relationship stable, alive and vivifying with Him.

     God offers a covenant between two freedoms: his, which is the initiative of infinite love, and ours, which is called to live and flourish from and for the loving freedom of God.

     If by grace we overcome temptation, God expands our heart so that it may have the gift of Him who is Love and gives us the way to do good to make our life a long praise to Him.

***2)  Hunger and desert.***

     One thing that is not secondary is that today’s Gospel tells us that Jesus is tempted by Satan after forty days and forty nights of fasting and, therefore, He is hungry.

    But it is not only a bodily hunger. Like every human being Jesus has three hungers:

a- for life which lures man to possession and accumulation of disproportionate assets (the stones to turn into bread),

b- for human relations that can be of friendship or of power, symbolized by the availability of power,

c- for  omnipotence, which pushes to suffocate the desire for God that is the yearning for the infinite and limitless freedom, leading to the temptation of designing his own human existence according to the criteria of the ease , success , power, appearance, namely the temptation to worship the Liar (the devil) instead of worshiping the true provident Love.

     But Jesus chose another criterion, that of faithfulness to God's plan which fully endorses and of which He is the Word made ​​flesh to redeem us, taking our condition marked by poverty and suffering   and choosing with courage to become the servant of all.

     To overcome these trials, this hunger for life, relationships and God, man has an infallible tool: the Word of God. Let’s  then rewrite a sentence of St. Augustine: When you're caught by the pangs of hunger - and we can also add of temptation - let the Word of God become your bread of life , let Christ be your Bread of Life.

     At this point, I think it is fair to ask why Jesus to fast, went into the wilderness.

     In the biblical tradition the desert was the place of preparation for a divine mission. So it had been for Moses, who knew the revelation of Yahweh (Exodus 3.1) and for the people out of the slavery that experienced the fatigue of freedom. So it was for Elijah, who listened to the word of God (1st Kings 19:18). Then also Jesus remained in the solitude of the desert for forty days[[2]](https://br-mg5.mail.yahoo.com/neo/launch?.rand=ca85rhmhsdt3b" \l "_ftn2) before beginning His public ministry.

     Jesus has done so to teach us to live life as an exodus in the desert as it was for the Jewish people and as it must be for the Church, pilgrim to heaven. This means that we cannot plan our life, we cannot decide it, but we must abandon ourselves to a Word of promise. God says to us: "Nothing you'll miss, but everything you will have to expect from me." This is the meaning of *faith,*not only assent to a body of doctrine, but trust of a love and belief in love: a love that has started without us (the exodus from Egypt as for us the output from our mother's womb), but that will only continue if it finds our acceptance.

      We are asked to translate our daily behavior and the care for ourselves in that Other who has made us free.

     Almost all of us are called to exist tomorrow, not in the emergency situation of the desert, but in the normal situation of a land to cultivate and to inhabit. However, all of us are called to have the same basic attitude: to live on that land but with a heart of the desert.

     This heart is particularly asked to Consecrated Virgins, which in physical solitude are called to a face to face with God: to speak to the heart.

     The desert, the virginal solitude, is the best place, the place where we are face to face with God. The Bridegroom cannot force the bride to love Him. The Lord, however, has an infallible tool, as described, for example, by the prophet Hosea. In chapter 2, Hosea speaks of the terrifying adultery that is the return to worship the idols that the old fathers worshiped. The Lord grieved and distressed, intervenes and says that he has a tool and will put it into action. He will return the people to the desert will point out again the old roads, will speak again to his heart in the desert when the evil categories, the opaque diaphragms have fallen. Then the heart of man, namely his intelligence and the heart of God, namely the divine Wisdom, will be face to face and their meeting immediate, possible and fruitful.

     The consecrated virgins live the "desert" of their vocation as total availability. Theirs is a spirituality of the generous availability to others and of the total availability to the Lord from whom they expect everything.

     Let’s with prayer , almsgiving and fasting , all learn this availability to walk united in the "desert " of Lent and of life so that hunger will become holy desire of  God. We will be the Tent where the Emmanuel, God with us always, will be at home.

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Roman Rite - First Sunday of Lent - Year A - March 9, 2014

Gen 2 , 7-9 , 3, 1-7 ; Ps 51; Rom 5, 12-19 ; Mt 4 , 1-11

Ambrosian Rite - First Sunday of Lent

Is 58: 4b - 12b; Ps 102; 2 Corinthians 5: 18 t- 6.2; Mt 4: 1-11

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[[1]](https://br-mg5.mail.yahoo.com/neo/launch?.rand=ca85rhmhsdt3b#_ftnref) The Christian interpretation of Exodus is guided by the reading that is usually called “typological”.  Everything about Israel (characters and events, rituals and institutions) is the figure - the*typos* - of what happens in Christ and in the Church. Let’s recall briefly the main steps of Exodus to see how they are reproduced and reinterpreted on the basis of the Christian event.

First stop: Egypt (and the Pharaoh) is intended as the figure of sin and especially of the universal condition of sin that before the coming Christ held humanity enslaved. But Egypt can be also the one that causes sin, Satan, or his historical transcription, the pagan idolatry. As a result, the deliverance from Egypt through the passage of the Red Sea will be the figure of baptism, and the sacrificed Passover lamb will become the symbol of Christ in his passion.

The stop of the desert is taken as a figure of the believer's life on the road. In it, as for Israel, test and temptation appear, but also the divine protection will unfold with particular intensity. The miracles of the Exodus become the miracle of the sacramental existence: the rock is Christ from which the water of baptism flows and manna became the Eucharist. The desert can be internalized as individual journey of the soul to contemplation and spiritual perfection or can be experienced as a journey (Lent) to prepare Easter celebrations.

The Christian meaning of the Law is found in the condensation of all ethical and social laws into charity, while the ritual laws find their truth in the Christian worship.

Finally, the Promised Land proposes once again the sacramental reason: the passage of the Jordan, like the one of the Red Sea, refers to baptism, while in the “land flowing with milk and honey" the Fathers of the Church see a striking figure of the Eucharistic banquet. Next to this , and even more frequently,  is the interpretation of the promised land as the final image of life with God

We can sum it all up by saying that the typological sense of Exodus is the route of the Christian people from the slavery of sin, through baptism and life in faith and charity, up to the heavenly homeland.

[[2]](https://br-mg5.mail.yahoo.com/neo/launch?.rand=ca85rhmhsdt3b#_ftnref) Forty is a symbolic number.  In this case, besides being connected to the forty years spent by the people of Israel in the wilderness, it means a whole generation. Jesus becoming man was tempted all his life.

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PATRISTIC READING

 **From a commentary on the psalms by Saint Augustine, bishop**

(Ps. 60, 2-3: CCL 39, 766)

*In Christ we suffered temptation, and in him we overcame the devil*

*Hear, O God, my petition, listen to my prayer.* Who is speaking? An individual, it seems. See if it is an individual: *I cried to you from the ends of the earth while my heart was in anguish.* Now it is no longer one person; rather, it is one in the sense that Christ is one, and we are all his members. What single individual can cry from the ends of the earth? The one who cries from the ends of the earth is none other than the Son’s inheritance. It was said to him: *Ask of me, and I shall give you the nations as your inheritance, and the ends of the earth as your possession.* This possession of Christ, this inheritance of Christ, this body of Christ, this one Church of Christ, this unity that we are, cries from the ends of the earth. What does it cry? What I said before: *Hear, O God, my petition, listen to my prayer; I cried out to you from the ends of the earth.* That is, I made this cry to you *from the ends of the earth;* that is, on all sides.  Why did I make this cry? *While my heart was in anguish.* The speaker shows that he is present among all the nations of the earth in a condition, not of exalted glory but of severe trial.  Our pilgrimage on earth cannot be exempt from trial. We progress by means of trial. No one knows himself except through trial, or receives a crown except after victory, or strives except against an enemy or temptations.  The one who cries from the ends of the earth is in anguish, but is not left on his own.

Christ chose to foreshadow us, who are his body, by means of his body, in which he has died, risen and ascended into heaven, so that the members of his body may hope to follow where their head has gone before.  He made us one with him when he chose to be tempted by Satan. We have heard in the gospel how the Lord Jesus Christ was tempted by the devil in the wilderness. Certainly Christ was tempted by the devil. In Christ you were tempted, for Christ received his flesh from your nature, but by his own power gained life for you; he suffered insults in your nature, but by his own power gained glory for you; therefore, he suffered temptation in your nature, but by his own power gained victory for you.  If in Christ we have been tempted, in him we overcame the devil. Do you think only of Christ’s temptations and fail to think of his victory? See yourself as tempted in him, and see yourself as victorious in him. He could have kept the devil from himself; but if he were not tempted he could not teach you how to triumph over temptation.