**Fasting, Praying, and Almsgiving: A Lenten Call to Remember, Resist, and Renew**

First Sunday in Lent – 9 March 2025
Readings: Luke 4:1-13 | Deuteronomy 26:1-11 | Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16 | Romans 10:8b-13

Lent is a season of fasting, prayer, and almsgiving, inviting us to draw closer to God in body, mind, and spirit. These three practices—fasting, praying, and giving—are not just religious obligations but disciplines that shape our hearts and renew our faith. They guide us in remembering God's faithfulness, resisting temptation, and renewing our commitment to live as Christ's disciples. As we begin our Lenten journey, today’s Gospel brings us into the wilderness with Jesus, where He fasts, prays, and faces temptation. Through His example, we see what it means to rely fully on God.

The first temptation Jesus faces is about hunger. The devil tells Him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." Jesus, weak from fasting, is tempted to satisfy His physical need, but He answers, "One does not live by bread alone." This moment teaches us that fasting is not merely about denying ourselves food but about recognizing what truly sustains us. The Israelites, in our reading from Deuteronomy, were commanded to remember that it was God who provided for them in the wilderness. They were to bring the firstfruits of the land, not just as an offering but as a declaration that all they had came from God. Fasting does the same for us. It reminds us that our lives do not depend on material things but on the grace of God. It helps us resist the temptation of self-sufficiency and reorients our hunger toward God alone. More than that, fasting renews our sense of justice and compassion. When we willingly go without, we become more mindful of those who suffer daily, those for whom hunger is not a choice but a harsh reality. True fasting must lead us not only to spiritual discipline but to greater mercy, generosity, and love.

The second temptation Jesus faces is the temptation of power. The devil shows Him all the kingdoms of the world and offers them in exchange for worship. It is a test of loyalty—will Jesus seek glory on His own terms, or will He remain faithful to the will of God? His response is clear: "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only Him." This is the heart of prayer. True prayer is not about getting what we want but about seeking God above all else. Paul, in his letter to the Romans, reminds us that salvation is near: "The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart." When we confess that Jesus is Lord, we acknowledge that He alone is worthy of our trust. Yet, how often do we place other things at the center of our lives? How often do we let ambition, control, or fear take the place of God? Prayer is our way of resisting these distractions. It is how we turn back to God, renew our faith, and realign our desires with His will.

The third temptation comes at the pinnacle of the Temple. The devil dares Jesus to throw Himself down, quoting Scripture to suggest that God will save Him. This is the temptation to test God, to demand proof of His care. Jesus refuses, saying, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test." This moment calls us to examine our own faith. Do we trust in God's promises, or do we demand signs? Do we believe in His love, or do we seek constant reassurance? The practice of almsgiving speaks directly to this challenge. When we give freely, we trust that God will provide for us. In Deuteronomy, the Israelites were told to share their harvest with the Levites, the foreigners, and the poor, as an act of thanksgiving and faith. Giving is not just about charity; it is an act of trust. It reminds us that everything we have is a gift from God. It helps us resist the temptation of greed and self-preservation, and it renews our commitment to love as God loves—generously, selflessly, and without condition.

A few days ago, I had an experience that made me reflect deeply on this. I was in my kitchen, preparing my lunch, when I saw a woman outside, opening the trash bins of the neighboring building. It was clear that she was looking for something—perhaps food, perhaps anything of use. Immediately, my heart was moved. Without hesitation, I took a kilo of sugar from my kitchen and called out to her, offering it to her in German. "I have this for you," I said, hoping she would receive it. But she only looked at me and walked away. I was left standing there, the sugar still in my hands, confused and uncertain.

I do not know why she did not accept it. Maybe she felt ashamed, or maybe she did not understand my intention. Or perhaps, in that moment, I was confronted with the reality that giving is not always about the receiver—it is also about us. Almsgiving is not just about offering something to those in need but about our own willingness to see, to care, and to act with love, even when it is uncomfortable, even when we do not fully understand.

This experience challenged me. It made me ask: Do we give only when we know it will be accepted? Do we help only when it feels good? Or do we love and give freely, without condition, simply because God calls us to? In that moment, I realized that even when our attempts to give are rejected, the act of reaching out still matters. Maybe the woman was not ready to receive, but that does not mean we should stop offering kindness.

As we enter this season of Lent, we are invited to fast, pray, and give, not as empty rituals but as ways to remember God's faithfulness, resist the temptations that pull us away from Him, and renew our hearts in love and faith. Jesus' victory in the wilderness shows us the way. Fasting teaches us that God alone sustains us. Prayer deepens our trust and worship. Almsgiving transforms our hearts into vessels of generosity.

So here is my challenge to all of us today: Will we only fast for the sake of tradition, or will we fast in a way that opens our hearts to the needs of others? Will we only pray when we want something, or will we pray in a way that truly seeks God? Will we give only when it is easy, or will we give without hesitation, even when it feels uncertain?

This is the path to Easter, the path that leads through the cross but ends in resurrection. May this Lenten journey bring us closer to God, strengthen our faith, and prepare our hearts for the joy of Christ’s victory. Amen.