

First Sunday of Lent Year C
Dt 26:4-10; Ps 91; Rom 10:8-13; Lk 4:1-13

Our readings this first Sunday of Lent can be understood in the following way. In the first reading from Deuteronomy, Israel is at the edge of the desert, in the land of Moab, about to enter the Promised Land. They have been in the desert forty years; it had been a great and terrible wilderness with fiery serpents and no water, Dt 8:15. Yet God had tested Israel there, made Israel hunger, in order to teach him that “one does not live by bread alone,” Dt 8:3. Now in Dt 26, Israel is poised to enter the wonderful land they had desired, a place like Eden, a land “flowing with milk and honey.”

Our first reading anticipates this entry and instructs Israel to remember and confess all that it had gone through and all that God had done for him from the time of Jacob’s wanderings to this moment, and to thus offer the first fruits of their new home. We readers of the Bible know that this anticipation is only the beginning of a long story: Israel would enter the land but not remain long in it; they would go into exile in Babylon and have to cross the Jordan all over again.

Jesus retraces Israel’s history and redeems it. He is baptized in the Jordan and probably crossed it symbolically and entered the land, but then, in our gospel passage, he, now filled with the Holy Spirit, “turned back” into the desert. It is there that he is now tested like Israel had been, only this time he successfully passes the “test” (in Latin, *temptatio*). He in fact retorts to the devil with words from Deuteronomy (Dt 8:3; 6:16). The devil quotes our Ps 91 regarding the angels’ protection of those who trust God.

In fact, a “guardian angel” had been provided by God for Israel to guard and guide it to the “Place” (ultimately, meaning the place of God’s Presence, as in Dt 26:2) God had prepared, Ex 23:20. The devil ironically quotes Ps 91 to Jesus, trying to get him to rely on one Scripture at the expense of another. Jesus is fulfilling all the Scriptures, not just choosing the parts he likes (see Lk 24:25-27, 44). It was in this way that he became for us the source of eternal salvation (Heb 5:8-9); this is confessed in the second reading from Paul’s letter to the Romans.