



a Kendall Hunt Company

First Sunday of Lent, Year C, Catechist - RCLB Lectionary



Catechist Background and Preparation

To prepare for the session, read all the readings.

Deuteronomy 26:4-10

Psalm 91:1-2, 10-11, 12-13, 14-15

Romans 10:8-13

Luke 4:1-13

Spend a few minutes reflecting on what these readings mean for you today. Was there a particular reading which appealed to you? Was there a word or image that engaged you?

Read the Word in Liturgy and Catholic Doctrine sections. These give you background on what you will be doing this session. Read over the session outline and make it your own. Check to see what materials you will need for the session.

The Word In Liturgy

To understand the readings this Sunday it is necessary to recall the place of divine election in salvation history. The greater part of the Old Testament concerns God's actions in relation to the people of Israel, whom God chooses from among all peoples to reveal divine goodness. The people of Israel, unlike their neighbors, believed that God was revealed not primarily through the cycles of nature, but rather through God's free actions in history. Israel's consciousness of being God's elect was not based on pride or a sense that they had merited God's favor, but simply on their repeated experience of God's faithfulness to them. A small and insignificant people compared to the flourishing civilizations around them, Israel marveled at God's favor given freely to them and regarded it as a wonder and a sign. This is the people who are bidden by the first reading from Deuteronomy to bring the first fruits of their harvest to the Lord, and in doing so, to confess God's goodness. Considered by many to be one of the most ancient and important passages of the Pentateuch, this creedal statement recalls God's special favor to Israel in the events of its history. It is the people's own acknowledgment of the election that lay at the very center of their existence.

An account of Jesus' temptations in the desert appears in all the synoptic gospels and is taken from one common source by both Matthew and Luke. In Luke's Gospel, the devil's power amounts to a separate kingdom, in tension with the kingdom of God. Throughout Jesus' public ministry, and finally at the cross, the conflict between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the devil continues to be revealed in Luke.

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The temptations Luke describes would have recalled to his Gentile audience the three great temptations: love of pleasure, love of riches, and love of power. More fundamental to the story, however, is its Jewish background, which is found in the Israelite experience of wandering forty years in the desert after the deliverance from Egypt. There they were tested by physical hunger, the lure of idolatry, and the temptation to test God. Led into the desert by the Spirit for forty days, Jesus experiences the very same temptations but responds to each of them out of his deep fidelity to God. He answers the devil's proposals with the words of Deuteronomy, that passionate work revealing the heart of the Mosaic covenant. He chooses to rely on God's word, to worship God alone, and to trust God humbly. By responding in this fashion, Jesus reverses the human unfaithfulness that has ever been part of the story of God's dealing with those whom he chooses and becomes the exemplar of the right response to God's election.

Catholic Doctrine

Divine Election

The starting point for a Catholic understanding of divine election is with Hebrew scriptures and Israel's own view on being set apart that is contained in those sacred pages. This point has already been emphasized in the previous section, but it bears repetition. It is God who does the choosing. Israel is not elected or set apart because of any intrinsic characteristics as a people. The choosing comes about because God is totally and absolutely gracious—in spite of the repeated refusal of humans to turn away from sin.

Israel experienced this divine election in the historical events of a loving God who again and again pursued this wayward and insignificant people. As expressed in the Old Testament, the purpose of this special election as the Chosen People is not for their own sake but for the sake of manifesting God's grace, glory and power to the whole world.

Jesus Christ stands at the apex of this historical unfolding of God's divine election. The New Testament scriptures attest that Jesus is God's elect. Jesus, in his humble submission to the will of the Father and the plan of God, exemplifies for us the right response to divine election. On this Sunday we always read from a gospel account of the temptation of Jesus. His 40 days in the desert echo Israel's testing for 40 years. These gospel accounts tell of Jesus' unswerving trust and worship of his loving Father.

God acts, God chooses, and in so doing, human pride is confounded. So, too, the pride of Satan is overturned. The entire life of Jesus, his ministry, his suffering and death, all point to



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God and God alone whose reign is overtaking this world. For in Christ, the faithful are gathered up, given membership in this kingdom and presented to God in a new and everlasting covenant.

Therefore, Catholic teaching emphasizes that the Church inherits Israel's election. While we still regard the Jewish people as "chosen" (for how could God go back on his promise?), nevertheless divine providence and grace are opened up in a new way by the coming of Christ.

