

Jesus' identity was revealed by God himself with this proclamation: "You are my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." In the wilderness, Satan offers Jesus three tempting possibilities to deny His true identity and to follow the ways of the world. Satan says to Jesus, "If you are the compassionate Son of God, turn these stones into loaves of bread, to feed the hungry in this rocky area of Palestine." What Satan proposes is actually good. But Jesus refuses the proposal. For God's people, material blessings alone are not enough to sustain them. We are in need spiritual nourishment to continue our journey of life. Jesus didn't come to be followed by people who just need material goods.

In the second proposal, we can see an interesting detail: Satan seems to have political and economic power over the nations of the world. Is this detail an ironic reality? Satan casts political power in terms of worship to offer Jesus another tempting proposal: "I will give you all of this power for you to do good if you kneel and worship me." It would be great for Jesus to be a figure of global influence and rule the nations of the world according to God's plan. The temptation looks good. But Jesus refuses. Politics and the economy cannot replace God. Money and politicians are idols for many people, and they do whatever is necessary to make more money, and they can even support a politician, even if the person is not really a righteous one. But Jesus' true identity is to teach us that we are to worship only God. Only righteous people can turn the nations of the world into great societies.

Finally, Satan seems to understand the lack of faith that will accompany Jesus' followers. So, he says to Jesus:

"Your disciples will need ways to prove that their beliefs are true, and you know, Jesus, great miracles will always attract huge crowds. Throw yourself down from the pinnacle of the church and show yourself safe and protected by God."

Once again, Jesus does not deny his identity as God's beloved Son. As a true man, He is also subject to the rules of the universe like every other human being. And Jesus is not a showman, willing to convince people that God loves them by the performance of extraordinary miracles and shows. Three offers are made followed by three rejections.

Here, Jesus is teaching us an important truth: saying NO to whatever denies or diminishes one's identity, is good and always necessary.

So, what does all of this have to do with us?

We are also God's beloved children. And this is our truest identity: You and I are God's beloved. If Jesus was tempted to deny His truest identity, we also have the same challenge in life. Consumerism tells us that we need money to buy things that make us happy. Immorality tells us that pleasure at any cost is what can bring us joy. As God's beloved children, we are created to love ourselves, to love God, to love the created world, and to love one another.

We hear voices calling us to hate one another, to exclude the different, and to eliminate our enemies. We also have voices calling people of faith to reject the immigrant and the poor, to justify all kinds of injustice and immorality, and to deny the dignity of the vulnerable. Some people even use the Scriptures to tell us that not all human beings are God's beloved Children. Like Jesus did in the wilderness, we are not to deny our identity, but to always affirm that every human being is a God's beloved child. We constantly hear voices calling us to deny our identity. But God's voice is always saying to each one of us, "You, and your neighbor, and everyone else on this planet are my beloved children, for whom my Son died on the cross."

I am sure you all have watched the Buddhist Monks who walked from Texas to Washington DC, spreading a message of mindfulness, compassion and peace. Why did they succeed in their purpose? Why did they touch the hearts of so many people during their journey? Maybe these monks are showing us something deep about who we truly are: Pilgrims on this planet, who, in the depths of our hearts, long for brotherly love, peace, compassion, inclusiveness, freedom, joy, and justice. The monks basically show us the kind of society that we all long to see in America and in the world. They also show us what God created us to be people willing to change the world, as we spread a message of brotherly and compassionate love, without any kind of violence.

The story of the temptations teaches us that we are always called to deny our identity. But the story gives us hope: Like Jesus, we can keep our focus on what God created us to be.

The Universal Prayer First Sunday of Lent  
22nd February 2026

Celebrant:

Sisters and brothers, in the struggle of Jesus with the evil forces of Satan, we discover that the grace of the Holy Spirit sustained him and will enable us also to overcome our temptations.

1. May the call of Pope Leo urging Catholics to place God at the center of this Lent, to fast from hurtful words, and to cultivate attentiveness to the suffering of others, bring about a deep conversion of heart.

We pray to the Lord.

2. May the catechumens of our Diocese and Parish draw closer to Jesus Christ as they participate in the Rite of Election today, leading to their Easter Baptism.

We pray to the Lord.

- <sup>3.</sup>4. May the leadership of nations in war, put aside all weapons and hatred, and seek a just and lasting peace, so that people can rebuild their lives and cities and be healed of their wounds and grief.

We pray to the Lord.

- <sup>5.</sup>6. May we all, during this time of Lent, seek the grace to follow Jesus and, in the wildernesses of our lives, draw closer to him and feel the support of the angels.

We pray to the Lord.

- <sup>7.</sup>8. May more young women and men, find a way to follow Jesus through religious life in the Daughters of St. Mary of Guadalupe, and through the priesthood in the Diocese of Raleigh.

We pray to the Lord.

- <sup>9.</sup>10. May our deceased relatives, friends and parishioners find eternal peace in God, and may the blessing of comfort be given to all who mourn their deaths.

We pray to the Lord.

Celebrant:

Almighty God, be merciful to us sinners, renew us in your Son Jesus, and in all our trials bring us the comfort of your holy angels. Through Christ our Lord