

Lent 1 / March 9, 2025

Romans 10:9

*“Because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”*

Everyone who believes in Jesus and confesses His name will be saved

The Sundays of Lent begin with Jesus in the wilderness, fasting for forty days and being tempted by the devil. The wilderness is a place of great significance in the bible as a place of spiritual struggle, growth, self-reflection and potential. The wilderness was a quiet place, where free from the background noise and distractions of daily life, the prophets heard the word of the Lord. The wilderness was a place of refreshment. Elijah travelled forty days to Mount Horeb to hear the word of the Lord. Elijah was strengthened to make that journey with bread and water provided by the Angel of the Lord. The wilderness was a place of God’s protection. Elijah sought refuge in the wilderness from the wrath of King Ahab and his queen, Jezebel. The Lord protected Him with His word.

The first place Moses took Israel upon their exodus from Egypt was to the wilderness. At the base of Mount Sinai, the Lord met Israel and revealed Himself in lighting, smoke, earthquake and fire. The Lord made them His people, giving them His Law, righteous rules and commands. He promised to bring them through the wilderness to a land flowing with milk and honey. When Israel failed to trust the Lord to bring them across the Jordan River and into the Promised Land, Moses led them back into the wilderness for forty years, to learn that *“human beings do not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”* The wilderness is a place to be taught, be nourished in faith and strengthened in faithfulness by the word of God.

The first place Jesus went after being set apart in baptism for His work as Messiah was the wilderness. Jesus fasted forty days in the wilderness, not as an example for us to follow. Such fasting would endanger our physical well-being and probably result in the loss of our lives. Jesus fasted forty days in the wilderness not as an example for us to imitate, but as part of His work of earning our salvation through His active obedience to God’s word. Israel was in the wilderness forty years, because they would not trust the Lord’s promise and doubted His power to deliver them from their enemies. Jesus went into the wilderness as the faithful son of Israel, to fulfill in Himself what Israel had failed to do. God doesn’t want us to fast forty days in imitation of Christ. He wants to believe in Christ as our God and

Saviour. Jesus was sustained in body and spirit and overcame the temptations of the devil, by relying on the power of God's word. Jesus embodied the words of Moses who said, "*human beings do not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.*" God wants us to imitate Jesus in this, that we take His word to heart, believe in Christ as our Saviour, confess His name and so be saved. Everyone who believes in Him and confesses His name will be saved!

In our text St. Paul speaks of the nearness of the Lord's word and its power to generate faith in the hearts of those who listen, so that confessing Jesus as Lord, we receive salvation in time and life in eternity. People who fast for extended periods of time often speak of experiencing a certain clarity. But the most important clarity comes from the word of the Lord, which shows us Jesus as our God and Saviour. Fasting is a practice associated with Lent in particular and spirituality in general. It is good to separate ourselves from the distractions of daily living for a time, so we may focus more intently on the word of the Lord and listen for the Spirit to speak through the word. But we should never let any spiritual practice become more important than the word. "*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.*" The word leads us to Jesus. Jesus' fasting in the wilderness highlights the power of God's word to sustain us, body and soul, and meet our most important spiritual need, our need for God's righteousness, experienced as the grace of forgiveness, received through faith in Jesus as our God and Saviour.

The Holy Spirit leads us to Christ and gives us faith to believe in Him as our God and Saviour through the word. The Holy opens our lips to confess His name and call upon Him as our Saviour through the word. During Lent we may temporarily set aside the use of certain things to focus our thoughts more fully on Christ and the grace of forgiveness we receive through faith in Him. But the giving up of Lent is secondary to the taking up of God's word. Through the word, the Holy Spirit opens our hearts and illuminates our minds to receive God's grace in Christ Jesus. Through the word, the Holy Spirit opens our lips to confess Jesus as our Saviour in time and for eternity. Lent for some is a time to fast from certain foods, activities and pleasures to focus our minds on the cross and the path Jesus walked for our salvation. But Lent is mostly a time to consciously and intentionally feast on God's word as it comes to us in the scriptures, in the washing of baptism and through the body and blood of Jesus in Holy Communion, given and shed for our salvation. We do not live by bread alone. We live by the word that proceeds from the mouth of God. We fast in Lent to better feed on the word of Jesus, so that we may feast with

Him in paradise. The word leads us to Jesus. Everyone who believes in Him and confesses His name is saved in time and for eternity.

The word of the Lord is for all people. Paul writes in our text, *“There is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing His riches on all who call on Him.”* Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Call upon Him! God’s word in Christ is for all people, but it didn’t always seem to be the case. In the Old Testament God made a distinction between Israel and the nations. God called Israel out of the nations and made covenant with them through Moses at Mount Sinai. They were His people, chosen out of all the peoples of the earth. He made a distinction between them and the nations, so that through them He would make Himself known as the only God and through them, ultimately bring the blessing of Christ to all nations. In Christ, the Lord bestows His blessings upon all who call upon Him. Call upon Him!

God made a distinction between Israel and the nations, by giving them righteous laws by which they would show themselves His people by walking in them. God set them apart that through them He would make Himself known to the nations as the only God and the world’s only Saviour. They fulfilled their purpose, not through their obedience, but ironically, as a consequence of their disobedience. Because of their disobedience, God scattered them among the nations. In their exile and dispersion, the remnant of Israel learned the truth of the power of God’s word and clung to His words for their salvation. In the process they also shared His words with the nations among whom they lived. In this way God prepared all people, Jew and Gentile, for the coming of Jesus. God said through Isaiah, *“The word that goes forth from my mouth will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I send it.”* God sends His word for our salvation. God’s word leads us to Jesus. Everyone who believes in Him has salvation in time and life in eternity.

We observe Lent by setting the word of God as of first importance in our lives. We take time to read it, meditate upon it, pray it and discuss it with others. Lent is time to listen to the still small voice that spoke to Elijah in the wilderness. God speaks to us through His word in the scriptures and in the sacraments. The word is very near to us, in our ears to hear it, before our eyes to read it, in the water of our baptism, in the bread and wine of Holy Communion. The word is near so we may believe Jesus in our hearts and be justified, confess Him with our lips and be saved. God makes no distinctions between people. He calls all to faith. He promises that

everyone who believes in Jesus and calls on Him for salvation will be saved from sin, the devil and death in time and for eternity. God give us ears to listen, hearts to believe and lips to confess Jesus as our God and Saviour. In His Name. Amen