

Into the Desert

WISDOM FROM THE CELLS

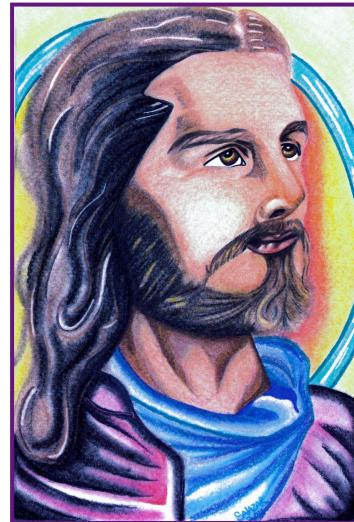
I remember the last time I was tempted. I have not used any type of drug for over two decades. At first, when I decided to stop using drugs, I began to sell drugs instead. But really, I just gave up my drug addiction for a new addiction, which was my greed for money. Making money illegally became my new way of 'getting high.'

I remember I would stay up all night to cut up drugs to be ready to poison the prison yard the next day. Some days I would only sleep 2 or 3 hours but I would wake up energized, as if I had just smoked some good crystal, which used to be my drug of choice. I would literally spend my days trying to figure out new ways to make money. It felt good being able to financially provide for my daughter and for myself.

When I made the best decision of my life to drop out of the gang life, I did it because I wanted to change. I was no longer happy with my life. I no longer wanted to make money that way. I wanted to change for my daughter. For the first month this was a battle for me. I was tempted to make a phone call and get some drugs lined up and start making money again. A voice in my head would whisper to me, "Just do it; you can still change without giving up what you enjoy doing." That was the devil talking, tempting me, and lying to me that all would be all right. Right away another voice would tell me, loud and clear, "You know you're fooling yourself. If you make that phone call, your whole being will get corrupted all over again." I struggled with that temptation, but in the end, with the help of some other inmates who just like me wanted to change, and the support of others who wanted to help me, I was able to resist that temptation. I am now twenty years sober and done with that lifestyle. Jesus Christ is molding my heart and has transformed my life.

-Erik, who was in a California State Prison.

1st Sunday of Lent
Cycle A | February 22, 2026



Art by J. Salazar

PENITENTIAL RITE

Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins and bring us to everlasting life.

R. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Let us pray:

LORD,

In these 40 days of Lent, may our hearts grow closer to you. We pray for the peace of your forgiveness, the light of your love, and deep concern for the people in our lives.

We ask this through Christ, our Lord. R. Amen.



LITURGY OF THE WORD

First Reading: Genesis 2:7-9; 3:1-7

The LORD God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being. Then the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and placed there the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground the LORD God made various trees grow that were delightful to look at and good for food, with the tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Now the serpent was the most cunning of all the animals that the LORD God had made. The serpent asked the woman, "Did God really tell you not to eat from any of the trees in the garden?" The woman answered the serpent: "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; it is only about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God said, 'You shall not eat it or even touch it, lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman: "You certainly will not die! No, God knows well that the moment you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods who know what is good and what is evil." The woman saw that the tree was good for food, pleasing to the eyes, and desirable for gaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate it; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made loin cloths for themselves.

The Word of the Lord.

R. Thanks be to God.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 51:3-4, 5-6, 12-13

R. Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.

Have mercy on me, O God, in your goodness;
in the greatness of your compassion wipe out my
offense.

Thoroughly wash me from my guilt
and of my sin cleanse me.

R. Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.

For I acknowledge my offense,
and my sin is before me always:
"Against you only have I sinned,
and done what is evil in your sight."

R. Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.

A clean heart create for me, O God,
and a steadfast spirit renew within me.
Cast me not out from your presence,
and your Holy Spirit take not from me.

R. Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.

Second Reading: Romans 5:12, 17-19

Brothers and sisters: Through one man sin entered the world, and through sin, death, and thus death came to all men, inasmuch as all sinned. For if, by the transgression of the one, death came to reign through that one, how much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of justification come to reign in life through the one Jesus Christ. In conclusion, just as through one transgression condemnation came upon all, so, through one righteous act, acquittal and life came to all. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so, through the obedience of the one, the many will be made righteous.

The Word of the Lord.

R. Thanks be to God.

Gospel: Matthew 4:1-11

At that time Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was hungry. The tempter approached and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become loaves of bread." He said in reply, "It is written: *One does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.*" Then the devil took him to the holy city, and made him stand on the parapet of the temple, and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written: *He will command his angels concerning you and with their hands they will support you, lest you dash your foot against a stone.*" Jesus answered him, "Again it is written, *You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.*" Then the devil took him up to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in their magnificence, and he said to him, ""All these I shall give to you, if you will prostrate yourself and worship me." At this, Jesus said to him, "Get away, Satan! It is written: *The Lord, your God, shall you worship and him alone shall you serve.*" Then the devil left him and, behold, angels came and ministered to him.

The Gospel of the Lord.

R. Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.



MEDITATION: THE DESERT

lent is the time
of going with jesus
to the desert

in the desert
there is no noise
no buildings
no people

i find a rock
and sit on this rock
i listen to the quiet
of the desert silence

i begin to feel uncomfortable
i have to look inside
i have to face things
moving around in me
that i have been
running away from
i feel uneasy
to close my eyes
but there is a desire
to run away
from the stillness
of the desert

at this moment
i notice a movement
in the distance
slowly
someone begins to
walk towards where
i am sitting
he comes closer

i recognize him as jesus
he seems to be enjoying
the beauty of the desert
and the quiet
he asks me
if he can sit next to me
on the rock
he asks me
why i feel so panicky

i tell him
that i am not used
to looking at
what is going on
inside myself
it is easier to run away
from all these things

and just keep busy
and keep the same routine

he looks at me
and asks me
what is the hardest relationship
in your life right now?

i tell him
and he asks me
how he can help me
during these
forty days of lent
to improve this relationship
with this person
and if there is anything
he can help me with

i tell him how difficult
this person is
as i am speaking
jesus notices
how moved i am
when speaking to him
about this person

tears begin to
warm my eyes
i can tell jesus
understands what
i am saying and
he knows how difficult
this relationship is

i ask jesus
what can i do to improve
this relationship?

we then remain silent
for some time
enjoying the beauty
of the desert
watching the birds fly
in the distance
watching the deep colors
of the cacti
then jesus asks me
what would you like
to work on during
these forty days
besides this relationship?

he asks me

how is your family doing?
i tell him who
i am having problems
with in the family

then i tell him
about my work
and school
the challenges
the frustrations
and he also seems
to understand
how difficult it is

i reach into my pockets
and my wallet falls
onto the sand

he says to me
we are in the desert
you cannot buy anything
with money

jesus asks me
how is your relationship
to money?
with whom do you use
the resources you have?

then jesus asks me
do you think it is
very hard to change
deep ways of darkness
in the heart?
is it easy?

then he asks me
would you like to fast
like he did during
these forty days?

i ask him
what does this mean?
and he explains
that it is hard
to face the darkness
that each one of us
has inside
and sometimes
when entering into
the discipline of fasting
we find that we are able
to break the chains

that are keeping us
bound to certain
attachments
in our relationships
with people
to money
to alcohol
or other addictions

i tell jesus
i do want to change
during these forty days

i tell him what
my attachments
are in my life
i tell him i would like
to do some penance
and fast
this is how he can help me
with this part of my life
this is what
i need to work on

and then he asks me
what positive things
would you like to do
during these days
for someone else?
what service or what
act of compassion
would you like
to carry out?

as i tell him
he seems happy
that i no longer
feel uncomfortable
being here in the desert
in the stillness

it is easier to be
with what is going on
inside



REFLECTION: I remember the last time I was tempted... This is the temptation that I have been struggling with lately... I remember... I remember...

OUR FATHER

Let us pray with confidence to the Father in the words our Savior gave us:

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy Kingdom come,
thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass against us,
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.**

**R. For the kingdom, the power and the glory
are yours, now and for ever. Amen.**

SIGN OF PEACE

Jesus, you said to your apostles: "I leave you peace, my peace I give you. Look not on our sins, but on the faith of your Church, and grant us the peace and unity of your kingdom where you live forever and ever. **Amen.**

The peace of the Lord be with you always.

R. And with your spirit.

LAMB OF GOD

Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world:
Have mercy on us.

Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world:
Have mercy on us.

Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world:
Grant us peace.

This is Jesus, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. Happy are we who are called to his supper.

**Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter
under my roof, but only say the word and my
soul shall be healed.**

COMMUNION

CLOSING PRAYER

Let us pray:

LORD,

You spent forty days in the desert without food and were tempted. Be with us as we fight our everyday temptations for the things that lead to darkness. Lead us on the path of life and love.

We ask this through Christ, our Lord. **R. Amen.**

