

## LENT ONE, YEAR A, FEBRUARY 22, 2026

The first Sunday of Lent always brings us the story of Jesus' temptations. And every year we are tempted to domesticate it — to turn it into a moral tale about resisting chocolate or swearing or impatience.

But temptation is not trivial. It is not cute. It is not a private inconvenience. Temptation is a wedge. In the world of physics, the wedge is one of the most powerful tools ever designed. Slip its thin edge into the smallest crack, and with enough pressure, it can split stone, timber and iron. Once the wedge is in, division is only a matter of time.

This is how temptation works. It does not arrive with horns and fire. It slides quietly into the cracks of our hunger, our fear, our ego — and begins to split us from God, from one another, from our own souls.

And that is what confronts Jesus in the wilderness. The devil does not tempt Jesus with something obviously wicked. There is no invitation to cruelty, no command to murder. Instead, the devil offers what seems reasonable. Practical. Even compassionate. "Turn these stones into bread." What could be wrong with bread? Jesus is starving. Isn't hunger a problem to solve? Isn't the Son of God entitled to relief?

But look closer. The temptation is not about bread. It is about control. It is about using power to eliminate dependence. It is about refusing to live within human limits. It is about manipulating creation to serve one's appetite. Sound familiar?

We live in a world that turns stones into bread every day — forests into profit, oceans into dumping grounds, neighbors into commodities. We consume without reverence. We extract without gratitude. We treat creation as if it has no intrinsic worth unless it satisfies us.

The wedge whispers: If you have power, use it for yourself. Jesus refuses. "Man shall not live by bread alone." In other words: There is a deeper hunger. And if we try to fill it with consumption, we will starve our souls.

Then comes the second temptation. Throw yourself down. Let God prove God's love by rescuing you. The lie here is seductive: If you are beloved, you will be protected from pain. Isn't that what we want? A faith that guarantees safety? A God who prevents diagnosis, disaster, loss? A religion that shields us from consequence?

But look at our world. Children still suffer. Wars still rage. Bodies still fail. If being beloved meant immunity, the cross would not exist. The wedge whispers: If God really loved you, you would not suffer. And how many people have been split from faith by that lie?

Jesus refuses again. He refuses to turn God into a vending machine for miracles. He refuses to weaponize Scripture for spectacle. He refuses to manipulate trust into a transaction. Because love is not proven by rescue from vulnerability. Love is proven by presence within it.

And then the third temptation — the most dangerous. "All the kingdoms of the world can be yours." Authority. Glory. Influence. Control. No cross required. The wedge here is massive. It is the ancient seduction of power without sacrifice. Authority without obedience. Glory without surrender. And we see this temptation everywhere.

In governments that baptize violence as righteousness. In churches that trade humility for influence. In leaders who confuse domination with strength. In ourselves, when we crave recognition more than faithfulness.

The wedge whispers: If you just had enough power, you could fix everything. But Jesus shows us another way. True power is not coercive. It does not shout others down. It does not crush opposition. It does not cling to platforms.

True power looks like nonviolent marchers on the Edmund Pettus Bridge facing batons and tear gas. True power looks like a solitary protester standing unarmed before armed forces. True power looks like a Savior who refuses to call down angels and instead stretches out his hands on a cross. The world calls that weakness. God calls it love.

The temptations in the wilderness are not ancient curiosities. They are the three great distortions of human history: the lust for wealth, the obsession with security, the intoxication of power. And the wedge still presses into our common life.

We are tempted to believe that consumption will save us. We are tempted to believe that safety is the highest good. We are tempted to believe that dominance is strength. But Lent strips those illusions away.

We can be loved and hungry at the same time. We can be faithful and vulnerable at the same time. We can be powerful in surrender at the same time. The question is not whether temptation exists. It is whether we recognize the wedge before it splits us apart. Jesus stands in the wilderness and chooses trust over control. Dependence over spectacle. Surrender over domination. And because he does, the wedge does not win.

Lent is not about proving how strong we are. It is about exposing the cracks. It is about naming the wedges. It is about choosing, again and again, to stand with Christ — even when that path leads not to applause, not to safety, not to instant satisfaction — but to the cross. But beyond the cross is resurrection.

There is a Franciscan benediction that I think encompasses the Lenten message perfectly. It says:

May God bless you with Discomfort at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships, so that you may live deep within your heart.

May God bless you with Anger at Injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that you may work for justice, freedom, and peace.

May God bless you with Tears to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation, and war, so that you may reach out your hands to comfort them and to turn their pain into joy.

May you live into your Lenten journey with grace and compassion. Amen.