

**Homily for the First Sunday of Lent
February 22, 2026**

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield, Illinois**

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Traditionally the Gospel for the first Sunday of Lent features Jesus being tempted by the devil (Matthew: 4:1-11). The background for this story is from the Old Testament Book of Deuteronomy (chapters 6 to 8), which show Israel's failures in obedience to God during her forty years' sojourn in the desert. Whereas Israel failed her test, Jesus in today's Gospel succeeds in defeating the devil's temptations. We hear that Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert where he fasted for forty days and forty nights. Then the devil makes his move.

The first temptation presented by the devil is that Jesus prove He is the Son of God by turning stones into bread. Objectively speaking, turning stones into bread would not be a bad thing. As a proof for Jesus' divine identity, however, it goes against the very mission of Jesus, who refutes

this temptation by quoting Deuteronomy (8:3). Obedience to God surpasses all forms of proof regarding who Jesus is.

The second temptation—*Throw yourself off the parapet of the temple*—has the same motive as the first; it challenges Jesus to prove He is the Son of God. The devil can even quote Scripture to support his challenge (Psalm 91:11-12). Again, Jesus draws on Deuteronomy (6:16) to show that His depth of obedience to God far exceeds the devil's temptations.

These three temptations grow progressively more intense. This third temptation—*Worship the devil*—is the most intense—with the most at stake. Jesus is offered all the kingdoms of the world if only He will worship the devil. At this point, Jesus shuns the devil's attacks and makes it very clear that he will worship God and serve God alone (Deuteronomy 6:13). Ironically, throughout these temptations, Jesus has, in fact, proven His divine identity. He did not do it, however, on the devil's terms. He did it instead on God's terms. True Sonship for Jesus is obedience to the Father. Jesus has come to restore through obedience what Adam and Eve lost through disobedience, as we heard in today's first reading from the Book of Genesis (2:7-9; 3:1-7). When we undertake our Lenten penances, let us remember that we are doing so in imitation of Christ.

In his message for Lent 2026, Pope Leo XIV described “*Lent as a Time of Conversion*” through listening and fasting. He said, “Every path towards conversion begins by allowing the word of God to touch our hearts and welcoming it with a docile spirit. There is a relationship between the word, our acceptance of it and the transformation it brings about. For this reason, the Lenten journey is a welcome opportunity to heed the voice of the Lord and renew our commitment to following Christ, accompanying him on the road to Jerusalem, where the mystery of his passion, death and resurrection will be fulfilled.” The Holy Father stressed “the importance of making room for the word through *listening*. The willingness to listen is the first way we demonstrate our desire to enter into relationship with someone.” We do this primarily by listening to the word in the liturgy and in Sacred Scripture.

Pope Leo said, “If Lent is a time for listening, *fasting* is a concrete way to prepare ourselves to receive the word of God. Abstaining from food is an ancient ascetic practice that is essential on the path of conversion. Precisely because it involves the body, fasting makes it easier to recognize what we ‘hunger’ for and what we deem necessary for our sustenance. Moreover, it helps us to identify and order our ‘appetites,’ keeping our

hunger and thirst for justice alive and freeing us from complacency. Thus, it teaches us to pray and act responsibly towards our neighbor.”

The Holy Father then offered a variation on the usual way of thinking about fasting and abstinence, saying, “I would like to invite you to a very practical and frequently unappreciated form of abstinence: that of refraining from words that offend and hurt our neighbor. Let us begin by disarming our language, avoiding harsh words and rash judgement, refraining from slander and speaking ill of those who are not present and cannot defend themselves. Instead, let us strive to measure our words and cultivate kindness and respect in our families, among our friends, at work, on social media, in political debates, in the media and in Christian communities. In this way, words of hatred will give way to words of hope and peace.”

Finally, Pope Leo noted how “Lent emphasizes the communal aspect of listening to the word and fasting,” saying that “our parishes, families, ecclesial groups and religious communities are called to undertake a shared journey during Lent, in which listening to the word of God, as well as to the cry of the poor and of the earth, becomes part of our community life, and fasting a foundation for sincere repentance. In this context,

conversion refers not only to one's conscience, but also to the quality of our relationships and dialogue."¹

Here in our Cathedral community, right after my homily today, we will welcome three people being received into the Full Communion of the Catholic Church: Gabriel (Gabe) Martinez, Matthew Nika, and Lisa Holladay, who will make their Profession of Faith and will receive the Sacrament of Confirmation. I will also administer the Sacrament of Confirmation to Lynise Gutierrez, who is already a baptized Catholic.

With them, all of us are called to ongoing conversion to a deeper relationship with Our Lord. In a few weeks we will be celebrating the paschal mystery on Good Friday and Easter Sunday. The purpose of Lent is to prepare us for that celebration by reminding us that through this mystery God has opened for us the gate of paradise. Lent is a season of grace. This sacred season is a gift, allowing us to give thanks in prayer, fasting and almsgiving in preparation for Holy Week and the great celebration of the Resurrection on Easter Sunday. This holy season is a blessed opportunity for our response to the love and mercy of God.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Message of the Holy Father Leo XIV for Lent 2026,
<https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2026/02/13/260213d.html>.