

First Sunday of Lent A 2026

Homily of Bishop Barres

St. Agnes Cathedral

February 22, 2026

I have a tradition in regard to the first Sunday of Lent and the Mystery of Our Lord's Temptation in the Desert.

I always reread Pope Benedict XVI's second chapter on "The Temptations of Jesus," in his classic work *Jesus of Nazareth* and I go to Bishop Fulton Sheen's third chapter "The Three Short Cuts from the Cross," in his classic work, *Life of Christ*.

Just this past week, I went into my storage boxes and rediscovered a hard cover copy of *Life of Christ* with these words of dedication in Bishop Sheen's own writing: "To My Dear Friends, The Barres Family, Who Moved Nazareth to Larchmont, Faithfully in Christ, +Fulton Sheen."

A few weeks ago, I made an appeal to our CFN audience that if they have any memory of Bishop Sheen on Long Island to please let me know.

So far:

We have pictures of Bishop Sheen dedicating the Our Lady of Lourdes grotto in 1945 at Notre Dame parish, New Hyde Park.

Fr. Duffy, our Cathedral rector, discovered pictures of Bishop Sheen in the St. Agnes Cathedral archives of Bishop Sheen being present at Bishop Kellenberg's Installation here at St. Agnes in 1957.

We hear that Bishop Sheen preached at St. Patrick's parish in Huntington and that the homily that still exists in print.

Just last night I received an email from a St. Agnes parishioner. He said that as a boy he served a Funeral Mass at Holy Name of Mary parish in Valley Stream, a Funeral Mass where both Bishop Sheen and Cardinal Cooke were present.

As we prepare for his Beatification, it's a wonderful time for us to remember Bishop Sheen's missionary presence to Long Island and his missionary presence to the world.

Bishop Sheen, Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Leo XIV would all point us to St. Augustine on this first Sunday of Lent.

In his commentary on the psalms in the Office of Readings of the Liturgy of the Hours this morning, St. Augustine has a concise and prayerful interpretation of the Mystery of Our Lord's Temptation in the Desert.

He writes: "Our pilgrimage on earth cannot be exempt from trial. We progress by means of trial. No one knows himself except through trial, or receives a crown except after victory...If in Christ, we have been tempted, in him we overcome the devil. Do you think only of Christ's temptations and fail to think of his victory? See yourself as tempted in him and see yourself as victorious in him. He could have kept the devil from himself; but if he were not tempted, he could not teach you how to triumph over temptations."

Pope Leo XIV, a true son of St. Augustine himself, writes: "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 (in the Sacred Scriptures) 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."

In our Lord's Temptation in the Desert described in Matthew 4, the devil quotes and misinterprets Scripture to tempt Jesus.

Jesus responds to these misinterpretations with his own authoritative interpretation and victorious response, a response which gives us the path to victory.

The Bible is "the sword of the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:17) and a weapon against the devil, his temptations, all his empty works and all his empty promises. The victorious Christ leads us to victory over temptation and sin.

And when we sin, fall, and fail our Lords teaches us to “learn of me because I am meek and humble of heart.”

He teaches us to start over with humility, trust, confidence and a winning and hopeful spirit.

On this first Sunday of Lent, we join our Lord Jesus in the Lenten desert. We ask the Holy Spirit to lead us to deep repentance for our sins and a new, deep and lasting conversion.

In the Lenten desert, we face our mortality. We face our death. We face that we are dust and to dust we will all return.

In the Lenten desert, we face ourselves, our temptations, our sins, our falls, our egos and resistances to grace.

We also experience the purification of silence and prayer.

We always remember that the Catholic spirit of repentance and our Catholic theology of the Sacrament of Penance are grounded in humility, mercy, forgiveness and charity rather than in the spirit of self-loathing, self-punishment and self-destruction.

The Season of Lent is a time for us all to express our sorrow for the squandered graces and lost opportunities in our lives, our hypocrisies, our insincerity and superficiality, our cowardice and lukewarmness, and our pitched resistances to grace and personal conversion.

Our Lord teaches us that he is with us in the temptations of life. He teaches us that with his presence and power, he will lead us to victory over sin and temptation and lead us to holiness and a missionary spirit.

The Holy Spirit is leading us from:

Pride to Humility

Anger to Mildness

Lust to a Liberating Chaste spirit

Gluttony to Temperance

Sloth to Zeal for the Faith

Greed to Detachment, Love for the Poor

Envy to Building up the Body of Christ

We open ourselves to conversion and the Paschal Mystery by opening our eyes to see the reality of our patterns of sin.

We know from experience that we cannot move forward on our own. We need Jesus and we need Mary.

Peter Kreeft interprets the Book of Genesis and the fourth Chapter of Matthew through Jesus and Mary. He writes: “Adam and Eve sinned together. Eve sinned first, then Adam. The new Eve, the second Eve, was Mary. As Eve was the first to sin, to say no to God, Mary was the first to reverse the curse by saying yes to God’s angel at the Annunciation. As Christ is the second Adam, Mary is the second Eve. Mary has many titles, but that is the first one given by the earliest of the Fathers of the Church: ‘the second (or new) Eve.’ As Eve was the physical mother of all mankind, so Mary is the spiritual mother of all the faithful. Jesus gave her to us in giving her to St. John when the two of them stood at the foot of the Cross as Jesus was dying: he said to Mary, ‘Behold your son,’ and to John: ‘Behold your mother’ (John 19:26-27). If we, like John, are his disciples, he was speaking to us too.” (A 170).

In union with the Jesus, the New Adam, and Mary, the New Eve, we connect our Lenten prayer, fasting and almsgiving for all the needs of the world. We open our eyes to the reality of these needs.

Bishop of Kharkiv

We pray for peace and justice in Ukraine¹, the Middle East, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Haiti and so many troubled areas of the world.

¹After his Angelus address this morning in Rome, Pope Leo XVI addressed the situation in Ukraine: “Four years have passed since the beginning of the war against Ukraine. My heartfelt thoughts remain focused on the tragic situation unfolding before the eyes of the whole world: so many victims, so many lives and families shattered, such immense destruction, such unspeakable suffering! Every war is truly a wound inflicted upon the entire human family; it leaves in its wake death, devastation and a trail of pain that marks generations. Peace cannot be postponed. It is an

We pray for those persecuted for their faith and we pray for the religious liberty rights of all people.

We pray for our witness to the Gospel of Life after the signing into law on February 6th of the Assisted Suicide Act by Governor Hochul.

We pray for immigrants, refugees and comprehensive immigration reform.

We pray with Pope Leo XIV for the ethical development of Artificial Intelligence.

Deeper Biblical and Liturgical Prayer

Deeper Fasting – including from critical and uncharitable remarks; social media

Deeper Almsgiving – love and awareness of the poor; see Pope Leo’s *Dilexit Te*, 115-120

This past Ash Wednesday, as ashes were placed on our foreheads, we heard the words:

”Repent and believe in the Gospel.”

”Remember, you are dust, and to dust you will return.”

In unity with our Holy Father and in solidarity with our catechumens, our sponsors, our parish RCIA teams and our pastors, we join our Lenten prayer, fasting and almsgiving to the universal aspiration to fraternity and our call to be “ambassadors of Christ.”

We look forward to the Easter Vigil and our catechumens’ reception of the Sacraments of Initiation where they will “plunge into the Paschal Mystery” in the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Eucharist.

urgent necessity that must find a home in our hearts and be translated into responsible decisions. For this reason, I renew my heartfelt appeal: let the weapons fall silent, let the bombings cease, let an immediate ceasefire be reached, and let dialogue be strengthened to pave the way toward peace. invite everyone to join in prayer for the embattled people of Ukraine and for all those who suffer due to this war and every conflict in the world, that the long-awaited gift of peace may shine upon our days.”

As we pray with and for our catechumens, the Season of Lent is a time to renew our confidence and trust in our baptismal call to holiness and mission. Each one of us is called to be and can be, with God's grace, a saint.

Let's take heart. Let's believe again that the Holy Spirit can take us where we need to go.

All of us experience sluggishness and lukewarmness. All of us experience resistance to grace. All of us experience emotional, psychological and spiritual ruts that we find it difficult on our own to emerge from.

But we renew our trust in the Holy Spirit working deeply within us. So often in life we discover that almost without ourselves knowing it, we have emerged from these ruts and the Holy Spirit has been at work helping us to embrace the healing power and mystery of the Cross.

Christ strengthens and sustains us in the temptations of life. We trust him to lead us to holiness.

