

Seton Hall University

From the Selected Works of Reverend Lawrence E. Frizzell, D.Phil.

March 9, 2014

Temptations as False Detours on the Way to Easter

Reverend Lawrence E. Frizzell, D.Phil., *Seton Hall University*



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons CC_BY-NC-ND International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).



Available at: https://works.bepress.com/fatherlawrence_frizzellphil/207/

Temptations as False Detours on the Way to Easter

**Reverend Lawrence E. Frizzell
Institute of Judaeo-Christian Studies
Seton Hall University
South Orange, NJ**

This article was previously published in *The Catholic Advocate*.

First Sunday of Lent

Sunday Readings for March 9, 2014 for Cycle A:

Gn 2:7-9; 3:1-7; Ps 51:3-6, 12-14, 17; Rom 5:12-19; Matt 4:1-11

TEMPTATIONS AS FALSE DETOURS ON THE WAY TO EASTER

Lawrence E. Frizzell

The distinctive nature of each season in the Church's year can be noted by any observant person but the content of symbols, gestures, sounds and colors must be taught. It is the special privilege of parents to share the various levels of the Church's heritage with their growing children.

The Second Vatican Council presented the liturgical season of Lent as follows: It has a twofold character, recalling our baptism or preparing for it and stressing a penitential spirit.

By these means especially, Lent readies the faithful for celebrating the Paschal Mystery after a period of closer attention to the Word of God and more ardent prayer. (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy #109).

The Paschal Mystery is an ancient designation for the Death-and-Resurrection of Jesus in fulfillment of God's plan and understood in the light of the Passover (*Pascha* in Aramaic). In the period just before Jesus, Jews used an Aramaic term rendered as "mystery" to describe the divine plan that was unveiled slowly so that the human race could appreciate the marvels of divine mercy. The Good News of Jesus' life, deeds and teaching revealed this mystery or plan that was kept secret for long ages (see Rom 16:25).

To understand the divine plan for humanity, we hear the brief portion of the creation narrative that describes God's work as a potter forming the first human being (the meaning of Adam) from the earth (*adamah*). The temptation and sin of the first couple seems simple, but to treat it as a child's story would be unfortunate. As each person's conscience is awakened the individual enters a situation where something wrong can be presented as beneficial. Evil can masquerade in every age so that it seems to offer life or foster its pleasures. May God open our eyes to see everything in the light of divine truth rather than through deceptive appearances!

The forty-day period of Lent offers us an opportunity to enter into union with Christ as we prepare to grapple with the mystery of life and the temptations that come our way. Just as Jesus experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit in a new way after his baptism by John, so we learn to appreciate the guidance of the Spirit in our life and mission. Prayer and fasting accompanied Christian baptism in the early Church (see Acts 9:19-19), so we strive to intensify our prayers by acts of discipline (such as fasting) in preparing to renew our baptismal commitment in the Easter Vigil.

Jesus rejected temptations that we all face in our daily lives. The three scenes illustrate important lessons. 1.) Special gifts and powers must be used for others in the service of the one God, not for selfish gain. 2.) Trust in God's care must be completed by prudent care of our health and safety. Thus Jesus rejected presumption when tempted to risk his life needlessly. 3.) So many are willing

to set aside moral principles in order to gain wealth and power! Jesus refused to enter into allegiance with evil in order to possess "the kingdom of the world". The meaning of human life is found in service of God. "The Lord, your God, shall you worship and him alone shall you serve" (Mt 4:10, quoting Deut 6:13).

Matthew records three texts from the Book of Deuteronomy in the responses of Jesus to the devil. In rejecting the misuse of Psalm 91 by the devil, he shows that even the Scriptures, torn from their context, can be used deceptively. As we listen ever more closely to God's Word in a spirit of prayerful attentiveness, we will come to understand aspects of the Paschal Mystery more profoundly. We may also be able to help others to set aside a cheap or inadequate approach to the Scriptures.