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The sun sets behind a desert view in the Spur Cross Ranch Conservation Area in Cave Creek, Arizona. (CNS/Nancy Wiechec)



by Mary M. McGlone

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"When I see your heavens, the work of your hands, the moon and stars that you put in place — what are we that you are mindful of us?"

Someone wrote Psalm 8 about 2,500 years ago. Long before that, Moses instructed his people to offer the first fruits of their harvest to the God who had given them everything. Centuries before the Conquista, or Spanish conquest, the Quechua and Aymara people of Peru celebrated a ceremony of burning coca leaves, agricultural products and other symbols of abundance to the [Pachamama](#), the Mother Earth.

These practices, present in almost every culture, are sacramental; they strengthen people's faith and deepen their relationship with God, the creator of life. The ceremonies express reciprocity among unequal partners. They symbolize the way the world should be: grateful, fruitful for all, equitable and living in harmony with one another and with God.

Today's short Gospel speaks of a darker side of human life. Luke begins by twice assuring us that Jesus was obedient to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Sent by the Spirit, his 40-day fasting retreat led him to a naked confrontation with himself which, of course, included a confrontation with Diabolus, the personification of lies and blasphemy, the sower of division among people and between people and God.

## **First Sunday of Lent**

[March 9, 2025](#)

Deuteronomy 26:4-10

Psalm 91

Romans 10:8-13

Luke 4:1-13

In his first test, Diabolus goaded Jesus to prove that he was Son of God by turning stone into bread, thereby making his own well-being his life's goal. Jesus rebuffed him saying that serving oneself first, prioritizing one's individual desires for security

or gratification, can never lead to a fully human life.

Diabolus then offered Jesus all his own power: the power of the lie, of domination, of generating dissention to consolidate his own supremacy. To gain that type of control, all Jesus had to do was worship that power and its master, Diabolus. Jesus replied that real power, divine power, comes from our God who offers everything freely and never coerces. For Jesus, this is the only God worthy of worship.

Having failed at recruiting Jesus through me-firstism or the power of despotism, Diabolus suggested that Jesus manipulate God, demanding that God fulfill divine promises in precisely the way he wanted. Like the conviction that a particular prayer will ensure success or an amulet guarantee physical safety, this scenario prodded Jesus to rely on magic instead of mutuality with God.

Finally, at Jesus' command, Diabolus skulked away to revise his tactics.

Diabolus failed because Jesus had faith in the Father who had given him the mission to incarnate divine love. This faith is what Paul calls his readers to in today's selection from Romans. First, Paul encourages his people to recognize God's presence among them: "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart." That echoes the intuition of ancient practices of thanks-offerings that recognized the nearness and care of the God of life.

Paul then explains that professing that Jesus is Lord and believing with all one's heart is all that is needed for "justification." In this sense, justification implies sharing in Christ's loving relationship with God and neighbor — all as a result of knowing the love of God. Believing in the Resurrection means that people bet their lives on the truth that the circle of divine love is unending and universal. Therefore, those who profess and believe will live like Jesus; their behavior will incarnate the faith they profess.

All of this could simply remain on the level of interesting theology illustrated by a good story, but that's never the intention of our Liturgy of the Word. The word dwells in us to form our thinking and inspire our living.

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In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis [described](#) our moment of history as pervaded by a consumerism that brings desolation and encourages covetous hearts, the pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and blunted consciences. In *Fratelli Tutti* he [said](#) we have "fed ourselves on dreams of splendor and grandeur, and ended up consuming distraction, insularity and solitude."

In a world like this, we can dedicate our 40 days of Lent to follow the lead of the Spirit and reassess everything just as Jesus did in the desert. Be forewarned that if we do that, Diabolus will seize the opportunity to try to waylay or distract us, or, just as likely, to prevent us from noticing that we are distracted, keeping us unaware or unbothered by the lies, violence and cruelty that pervade our world.

Lent is our time to allow divine love to touch us so deeply that we begin to see like Jesus did, and thus act in his name. Time is the only sacrifice God asks of us now, and God will reciprocate in wonderful and unexpected ways.

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