Homily for the First Sunday in Lent 2026 Year A

“Thou shalt not put the Lord God to the test”.

What on earth do those words mean? Having just listened to the story of the Temptation of Christ, how on Earth could you or I even begin to tempt God? What could we offer or propose to Him that is not already His? Isn't real life very much a one-sided affair and it is very much God who puts us to the test?

Time and time again, when life lifts up its head and hits us with pain, loss or suffering, we cry out to God, often in the silence of our hearts and ask why or why me? Why are You doing this to me? Why are You allowing this to happen? Why are You putting me to the test?

We know from bitter experience there are sometimes no clear answers to those questions. When we're engaged in this questioning of God it is then that we are “putting Him to the test”?

Now we have just heard Christ prohibiting that.

Is that fair? Does He really mean that we can never question God or the will of God? Why did God endow us with intelligence if He did not mean us to use it?

I think that what it means is this, we must certainly always use our intelligence and challenge and probe and ask questions of God. That is what the dialogue of prayer is all about. But we must never forget that there is, and always must be, a proper relationship between Creator and creature.

To make God more accessible to ourselves we often tend to fashion Him into our own image and likeness and that is fine if it helps. But what we forget is that it is not God, it is simply our idea or picture of God.

God in Himself, the creator of vast universes, of all that exists, is infinitely beyond our capacity to imagine or understand; the mind and the reasons of God's mind are for the most part beyond us, this side of Eternity.

What Christ is saying is that the creature should not test the Creator, because the creature cannot test the Creator. It is inappropriate and out of order. We may ask the questions, but when they have been asked the correct attitude between us and God, creature and Creator, is one of loving trust. God does not

have to give us answers. He doesn't have to explain Himself or justify Himself to us.

Sometimes, when we engage in this dialogue with God, when we pray, without thinking too much about it, our prayers are inappropriate. When we do not get the answers we want, we are puzzled, hurt, or even angry with God. But God cannot answer some of our prayers. The fault does not live with Him, but with us, in what we pray for. We are inappropriately putting Him to the test.

As an example of what I mean, look at these three Temptations of Christ.

In the first Temptation of Christ He is asked to turn stone into bread. We too often ask God unthinkingly for the impossible, and God cannot do the impossible. In the laws of nature the chemical components of bread and stone are totally different and that must be respected. God cannot do the logically impossible, for example turning a circle into a square.

These laws of nature, ordained by God, are like little paths of love that lead us to God.

So that when sickness or deaf threatens us, or those we love, or when nature is taking its course, our instinctive reaction is to pray for a cure. With very rare exceptions God does not suspend or contradict the laws and rhythms of nature that he has built into creation, and so our prayers are not answered. God simply does not see death as the terrible thing that we do. Just as our lives are His gift to us, so too are our deaths. Death is not an end, but just a change in how we experience existence.

In the second Temptation of Christ He is asked to throw Himself off the temple because God won't let Him be hurt. We should not put God to the test by asking for the gimmickry or the magical in our prayers; just because we trust in His love for us, that does not mean that God will always be necessarily provoked into intervention on our behalf to prove that love. The laws of nature persist. If I throw myself off a high building, then I will get hurt. I must learn to understand the laws of nature, and respect them and live within them.

In the third Temptation of Christ, He is told to “worship me and I will give you the Kingdoms of the world”.

You cannot bargain with God in prayer. What can you offer Him that is not already His? Do this for me and I will do this for You?

It is so easy to misuse prayer and inappropriately put God to the test.

If we think a little bit more carefully about what we pray for, then we will not fall into the trap of putting God to the test, especially when those prayers are not answered.

A wise man, reflecting on a long life of prayer and the experience sometimes of unanswered prayer, wrote as follows

I asked for health that I might do greater things;

I was given infirmity that I might do better things.

I asked for riches that I might be happy;

I was given poverty that I might be wise.

I asked for power that I might have the praise of men;

I was given weakness that I might feel the need of God.

I asked for many things that I might enjoy life;

I was given life that I might enjoy all things.

I got nothing that I asked for but everything I hoped for, almost despite myself.

My unspoken prayers were answered. I am among all men most richly blessed.