

***The First Sunday of Lent***  
***February 26, 2023***  
***Year of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Ark of the New Covenant***

*“From this scene on the pinnacle of the Temple . . . we can look out and see the cross.”*  
*(Joseph Ratzinger, Pope Benedict XVI)*

In the first and second temptation, Satan opened with the statement, “If you are the Son of God . . . “ This mocking statement from Satan presupposes the mocking of the crowd and one of the thieves, as Jesus hung from the cross, “If you are the Son of God, descend from the cross” (Mat. 27:40). In his second book in a series entitled *Jesus of Nazareth—From the Baptism to the Transfiguration*, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) made the statement provided at the top of this handout. He was, as we can surmise, speaking about Satan’s third temptation of Christ in the desert.

*“It’s not just about the manger where the baby lay. It’s not all about the angels who sang for him that day . . . It’s about the cross.”* These words, from a song written by Jamison Statema and Daniel Ball, express the whole of Jesus’ life and ministry. On this first Sunday of Lent, as we again look at the temptation of Jesus in the desert, this theme stands out for us once again—*“It’s about the cross.”*

The cross that Jesus beheld from the heights of the Temple is the same cross that surrounds us. Here in this sacred place, we are surrounded by many depictions of the cross. Many of us wear a cross around our necks and carry a Rosary. The cross is a major icon in our lives. But do we truly understand the significance of the cross that stood on a hillside so many years ago and so far from this place?

The Gospel writers have given us the story of the life and ministry of Jesus, including the Passion, Death and Resurrection. It is St. Paul, in his many letters, who brings us the meaning of the cross. In his letter to the Church in Colossae, Paul exhorts: *“And when you were dead in trespasses . . . God made you alive together with Him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross.”* In the words Paul wrote in this passage—and many others—he has defined the cross. Each of us has recorded a debt—a sin debt—that demands payment. This indebtedness has incurred upon each of us a death of spirit (Romans 6:23). In our finite selves, we do not have the ability or the resources to even begin to cover this debt.

Returning to Paul’s letter (Colossians 1:20): *“. . . and through Him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.”* By these words, our hope is restored. Nailed to the cross, sin and Satan are defeated. This is, for us, the significance, the very meaning of the cross. When temptation comes—when we are attacked from all sides—just like Jesus in the desert, we can look to the horizon, look to the cross for the strength to stand against all that assails us.