FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT - FEBRUARY 22, 2026

Many people today operate with an unspoken rule about reality: *if I can't see it, it doesn't exist.* And if science can't measure it, then it must not really matter.

It's an attitude we hear all the time. "Show me the proof." "I'll believe it when I see it." Anything beyond what can be observed, tested, or quantified is treated as imaginary or irrelevant.

But if we stop and think about it for even a moment, that attitude starts to fall apart. Look at how vast the universe is, and how small we are within it. Think about how much we still don't understand, not only about distant galaxies, but about our own planet, our own bodies, even our own minds. Does it really make sense to claim that the only things that exist are the things *we* can perceive with our limited senses? Or that the only realities that matter are the ones our very small intellects can fully grasp? Most reasonable people would admit the answer is no.

That doesn't mean science is the enemy of faith. Quite the opposite. Science has brought enormous good to the human family. It has cured diseases, expanded knowledge, and improved daily life in countless ways. Christians don't deny that for a second. But science also has limits. It can tell us *how* things work, but not *why* they exist. It can measure physical processes, but it cannot measure love, guilt, hope, or meaning. And it certainly cannot map the spiritual forces that shape our lives.

As Christians, we hold a view of reality that is actually more realistic, and far more interesting. We believe there is much more going on than meets the eye. There is a spiritual dimension to the world, and there are spiritual forces actively at work. We may not see them, but they see us. They influence us more than we realize, and they care deeply about the direction our lives take.

Some of these forces are for our good. Others are not.

We catch a glimpse of this spiritual reality in today's first reading from Genesis. The serpent is traditionally understood to be Satan. He is shown as intelligent, deceptive, and opposed to God's plan. He enters the garden not with brute force, but with a lie. He plants doubt. He suggests that God is holding something back. And by doing so, he succeeds in robbing Adam and Eve of the paradise God intended for them.

That raises a question people have asked for centuries: *Why did God allow this to happen at all? Why create beings capable of rebelling?*

The Christian tradition teaches that God created the angels with intelligence and freedom, just as He created us. Love, after all, cannot be forced. It must be chosen. Some of the angels freely chose to reject God. Satan led that rebellion, and others followed him. They were cast out of heaven, but their rebellion did not end there. Out of hatred for God, they targeted humanity, seeking to destroy us because we are made in God's image and likeness.

The consequences of that original fall are all around us. We know what the good is, and yet we struggle to do it. We see the damage sin causes, and yet we repeat the same patterns. Human

history bears the scars: violence, injustice, war, exploitation, and despair. We cannot see the spiritual battle behind it all, but we live with its effects every day.

And yet—this is not a story without hope. We have a Savior.

In today's Gospel, Jesus steps directly into that battle. He goes into the wilderness: a place of dryness, emptiness, and danger. It stands in sharp contrast to the Garden of Eden. The desert represents what sin has done to the world. And it is there that the devil confronts Jesus, offering Him shortcuts, half-truths, and temptations designed to weaken His trust in the Father.

But unlike Adam and Eve, Jesus does not fall. He does not argue. He does not negotiate. He stands firm. He answers with Scripture. He trusts the Father completely. And the devil is defeated.

That moment should fill us with enormous confidence. Jesus has already faced the enemy head-on and won.

It also teaches us something crucial about temptation. First, God never allows us to be tempted beyond our strength. No matter how powerful a temptation feels, we are never helpless. Grace is always available. Saying "no" is always possible.

Second, we are never alone in the struggle. Jesus does not watch from a distance. He fights with us. The same Lord who overcame temptation in the wilderness walks beside us in our own deserts. And we are supported by the angels, especially our guardian angel, who is constantly at our side. The saints remind us that we can call on Saint Michael, who once cast Satan out of heaven, to strengthen us when we feel under attack.

Evil wants us to believe it is unbeatable. Satan thrives on discouragement. He wants us to think our sins define us, that change is impossible, and that resistance is pointless. But that is another lie.

Here's a truth worth remembering: only one third of the angels rebelled. Two thirds remained faithful to God. So for every force working against us, there are even greater forces working for us. Evil may be loud, but it is not stronger. Darkness may feel overwhelming, but it is not victorious.

There is far more happening in this world than we can see. A real spiritual battle is being fought for our souls. But there is no reason for fear. Jesus has already won the decisive victory. Every time we resist temptation, every time we choose truth over lies, generosity over selfishness, faith over fear, we share in that victory. And we strengthen others who are fighting the same battle.

We do not fight alone. We do not fight in vain. We have a Savior who has already overcome the evil one. And in Him, the final outcome is never in doubt.