

First Sunday of Lent

Forty Days and Forty Nights  
Common Praise #175

1 Forty days and forty nights  
you were fasting in the wild;  
forty days and forty nights  
tempted and yet undefiled.

2 Burning heat throughout the day,  
bitter cold when light had fled;  
prowling beasts around your way,  
stones your pillow, earth your bed.

3 Shall not we your trials share,  
learn your discipline of will;  
and with you by fast and prayer  
wrestle with the powers of hell?

4 So if Satan, pressing hard,  
soul and body would destroy:  
Christ who conquered, be our guard;  
give to us the victor's joy.

5 Saviour, may we hear your voice  
keep us constant at your side;  
and with you we shall rejoice  
at the eternal Eastertide.

Jubilate Hymns version of Forty days and forty nights George H Smyttan (1822 - 1870)

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This popular Lenten Hymn always seems to herald the beginning of Lent for me. Usually sung on Ash Wednesday or the First Sunday of Lent it traces the journey of Jesus in the wilderness and, in the final verse, anticipates the day of Resurrection. The first four verses describe the physical trials and spiritual disciplines he follows and the temptations he suffers as are they are described in 3 of the Gospels (Mt 4:1-11, Mk 1:12-13, Lk 4:1-13) but interestingly not in the Gospel of John. The hymn occurs in over 130 different hymnals of various denominations

The hymn was written by the Rev. George Hunt Smyttan, B.A., a clergyman of the mid nineteenth century, "...born circa 1825, and educated at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, B.A. 1845. He took holy orders in 1848, and in 1850 was preferred to the Rectory of Hawksworth, Notts, where he died in 1870. He published *Thoughts in Verse for the Afflicted*, 1849; *Mission Songs and Ballads*, 1860; and *Florum Sacra*, n.d. He was the author of the well-known hymn, "Forty days, and forty nights"... and of a second which is found in several collections, "Jesu, ever present with Thy Church below" (*Holy Communion*), which appeared in the 2nd edition of *Lyra Eucharistica*, 1864."

--John Julian, Dictionary of Hymnology (1907)

The hymn is usually sung to the tune HEINLEIN (Aus Der Tiefe). It's somber, almost funereal feel sets the tone for this liturgical season of penitence and reflection.

Unlike our other liturgical seasons. the Lenten season calls us to self examination, to a shedding of distractions and luxuries and toward embracing simplicity and the basics of our spiritual life: prayer, fasting, reading holy scripture and alms giving. The hymn exhorts us to follow the example of Jesus as he prepared for his earthly ministry in the Judean wilderness.

Often people believe that Lent means "giving something up." Sometimes that means something trite like chocolate or swearing, but what if we used the time instead to examine our behaviors and change our ways (repentance)

Questions you might ask yourself during Lent:

- Am I open, honest and enthusiastic about my faith in Jesus Christ in my everyday life?
- Do I have a gracious and patient attitude with the people in my life?
- Do I look for the best in others, or do I have a judgmental attitude?

- Am I spending time studying the scriptures and praying?
- Do I have a thankful heart, or am I constantly complaining about situations and people in my life?
- What are the lurking sins that tempt me?
- Do I speak up for the less fortunate and actively work to better their lives, or do I remain silent and inactive?
- Do I stand up for my Christian beliefs, or do I compromise my faith in order to “fit in?”
- When people look at me, do they see a reflection of Jesus?