First Sunday of Lent

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In this liturgical year, barely three months separate the major celebrations of Christian faith: Incarnation and Death/Ressurection. Christmas is still fresh in our memories as we enter the subdued, thought-provoking liturgies of Lent on our way to the joyful revelation of Easter.

The earth itself journeys with us as it turns from the darkest days of winter toward the warmer, lingering light of the spring equinox. The first reading, from Deuteronomy, models that move by turning to a text which will be read by Jewish families at the Seder meal of Passover. It anticipates for us the Lord's supper which we will commemorate on Holy Thursday.

In a few short verses we hear the salvation story of God's people: from slavery to freedom: from promise to thanksgiving. With the poignant words—"A wandering Aramean was my father"—we are reminded of our own nomadic past, of our immigrant grand-parents, and of the thousands of refugees wandering the world today.

The gospel underscores the theme of journey. Luke speaks of Jesus wandering through the wilderness; not only the barren landscape of Judea but through the wasteland of temptation. The scene occurs right after the ritual baptism of Jesus in the Jordan river. Separating the two events is a genealogy which traces the lineage of Jesus back to Adam. Luke is reminding us that Jesus shared our human history as well as our temptations; and through Him we are linked to pre-history and to the destiny of Israel.

What lay ahead for Jesus after the baptismal event? What choices did He have as He grew to greater awareness of Himself as One set apart? Luke presents various options as temptations which Jesus must confront. He could choose power, wealth or freedom from pain and death. We can sum them up in a word which entices all of us—security.

Jesus responds to each temptation and in doing so He chooses the way in which He would live His life. He becomes the Way of Life into which we enter at our own Baptism; that is to say, the way of trust, of praise and service, of taking responsibility and accepting the consequences.

With Jesus, in Him and through Him, we must say "yes" to these fundamental options lest we confuse the realm of economic and military security with the reign of God.
We can use the second reading today to center us as we begin our Lenten journey. There's nothing to fear because the wealth of the Lord is already bestowed on us without distinction. God's security is ours in the bond which links God with all humanity, through all of history: that bond which is the Risen Christ. It's in calling on and drawing from that Bond that saving happens.