

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
COMPASS, PA

February 22, 2026 – FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT, YR. A

The Rev. Dr. Nina George-Hacker

Homily: “*Gospel Moments*”

Old Testament	Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7	(The fall of humankind into sin)
Psalter	Psalms 32	(Happy are those whose sins are forgiven)
Epistle	Romans 5:12-19	(By Adam came sin, by Christ came salvation)
Gospel	St. Matthew 4:1-11	(Jesus is tempted in the desert by Satan)

For many of us, Lent is the season of gloom and of giving up, of ashes and lashes. When it is gray outside and purple inside. When we feel guilty about not feeling guilty. Before we get too despondent, I'd like to accentuate the positive in Lent. On Ash Wednesday, we heard “the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel.” The question is, how can we, baptized believers, encourage other people to believe in the Gospel? The Good News of Jesus Christ?

I'm not going to suggest something complicated or difficult. What I'm proposing is a simple act we can all try every day of Lent: look to do the noble thing, the kind thing, no matter how small. Do the better thing, the nice thing, the Gospel thing.

Let me give you an example. Whatever you may think of Jimmy Carter as President, most would agree that he was a great humanitarian and a committed Christian. When former Vice President Hubert Humphrey died, there was a large memorial service where hundreds had gathered, among them former President Richard Nixon. This was not long after Nixon had been forced to resign in disgrace because of the Watergate Scandal, and its memory was fresh in people's minds. Guests mixed freely before the service, greeting old friends. Nixon, however, stood alone, isolated and shunned. President Carter entered the room, stood by the door and surveyed the scene. Immediately, he saw what was happening with Nixon standing all by himself. Carter walked over to Nixon smiling his big, warm, peanut farmer's smile, greeted Nixon and said, “Welcome back to Washington, Mr. President. Why don't you sit up front with me?” It was a Gospel moment. Embracing with kindness the outcast, the sinner, the unwanted. A small, simple, noble *Gospel moment*.

Many years ago, the late Father Henri Nouwen gave a lecture at the Catholic University in Washington DC. He is best known for his many books about spiritual life, and had an unusual capacity to write about the life of Jesus and the love of God in ways that inspired multitudes of people. The famous Dutch priest, writer, and theologian had dedicated much of his life to working with the mentally handicapped. At this talk, he had invited one of the members of his community, Bill, up to the podium to help with the lecture. Bill's eyes began to adjust to the lights, and then he saw the large crowd. He got so nervous, all he could do was to lay his head on Fr. Nouwen's shoulder and cry.

At that moment, many who were in attendance were reminded that the true purpose of being the Church is not about budgets, building programs, erudite sermons, or even devotions. As the Church, our work is to stand next with one another and provide a shoulder to weep on. This, too, was a small, simple, noble *Gospel moment*.

When we do the noble thing, the Gospel thing, there is always a benefit not only to others, but it always changes *us* for the better. The Franciscan Friars of the Atonement run a drug and alcohol rehabilitation, St. Christopher's Inn, in Garrison, New York. Father Warren, one of the friars, tells the following story: “We once had a young client named Jeff, who had been mandated by a judge to attend treatment. He was uncooperative and incorrigible. Normally a client such as Jeff would be asked to leave, but we decided to cut him some slack because if he left, he would have to go to jail. He continued to be a problem client.

During that winter—in really miserable weather—it was decided that some people should make a trip into New York City to give out blankets to the homeless. One of the friars and five men from the Inn went to distribute them. By some miracle, Jeff was included.

A large crowd of people living under a railroad bridge gathered around the van. After all the blankets had been given out, the men got back into the van. Jeff sat in the front seat next to the friar in charge. It had started to snow and when the friar looked down, he saw Jeff had no shoes on. He asked, “Jeff, where are your shoes?” Jeff replied, “I gave a man a blanket, but he had no shoes.”

It was another small, simple, noble *Gospel moment*. And from that time on, Jeff’s whole attitude changed. He started to cooperate with the program. Today he is a leading member of the Friars’ Alumni Association.¹

During Lent, let us try to be more kind, caring, and generous people, allowing small, simple, noble, *Gospel moments* to happen. Take some of that energy that goes into burnishing your exterior image or that diverts you into meaningless preoccupations, and build up your interior life. Because of our Baptism, we are called to bless others in Christ’s Name and for His sake, Lent is a time to recall both how we have been blessed by God, and how we can bless others. And one day, when Jesus asks, who did you reach out to? Who did you help? It would be wonderful to be able to list a whole bunch of folks.

Jesus, of course, will use other words, even though they mean the same thing. He will say, “I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me” (Matthew 25:35-36). Will that describe you?

Let us pray:

Generous and all-loving God, during this Lenten season—and always—may *we* be Christ to others, and *they* be Christ to us. We ask this in His precious and holy Name. *Amen*.

¹ Adapt. Bob Warren, SA, “Homily for the First Sunday in Lent,” 6 March 2022, [AtonementFriars.org](https://www.atonementfriars.org) <<https://www.atonementfriars.org/fr-bobs-homily-first-sunday-in-lent-2022/>> 9 February 2026.