

FEBRUARY 22, 2026 CARDINAL THOMAS COLLINS

The great Saint John Henry Newman, Doctor of the Church, had inscribed on his tomb these words— in Latin, but the English would say: "From shadows and illusions, into the truth." There's a lot of wisdom in that, which we should think about as we begin this season of Lent. For we live in a house of mirrors, where there are many illusions, many shadows. Things which are not real. And yet, there's no future there, no hope. Reality bats last.

We have to be able to see clearly through the shadows and illusions, to be able to receive life. We don't want to be like someone going across a desert, seeing, they think, palm trees and things ahead of them, and water... As they get there, it's just a mirage. It's just an illusion. Sand. Nothing there. They want an oasis, the real thing. With cool, refreshing water, that gives life. And so do we in this world. We need to be able to sift out the shadows and illusions, and find out what is real.

And that is not easy, because we all tend to be deceived. Deceived by the world, the flesh, and the devil. All three of them are at work, and we're all pretty well affected by them. And we need to be aware of them. Lent is a time to sharpen our perception. Strip away the illusion, see what's real, and not be deceived.

We look at the first reading today, the temptation in the garden of Eden. And the tempter is there, and God has given everything. The reality— he's given huge abundance of goodness and all these wonderful things to man and woman, to Adam and Eve. It's just, there's a limit though. They're not God. They don't have all power. So there's one limitation. They're not to eat of one tree in the whole garden. A little recognition of

their limits. Of the reality that we're limited. But they want it all, and the tempter leads them that way. And, they fall. They give in to the illusion.

And he spins it so beautifully. And when Eve is looking at the— we don't know what, they always say the problem is not the apple in the tree, it's the pair on the ground. That's the problem in the garden of Eden. But she took and the reality, it is good to eat! And beautiful to look at. And wonderful for the knowledge it gives. Notice how it goes, you know, the real motivation. And then we always rationalize, and make it look better. And fool ourselves. The tempter's fooling her, but she fools herself.

And mind you, it takes her a whole paragraph to get deceived, whereas Adam takes half a phrase. Boom. He's gone. So there we are... We need to be able to understand the shadows and illusions, and see the truth.

And we look at our Lord himself, as he prepares for his sacred ministry. He is led out into the desert by the Holy Spirit, to be tested, as the people of God were tested in the desert. But of course, really, to show what matters. We see the temptations, which the devil places before him.

Temptation to show off in some spectacular way his ability to provide material supplies for people. That will make him popular. But he says, no, man does not live by bread alone. We gotta go deeper than that.

And then the devil takes him to the temple, to the high pinnacle of the temple, and he wants him to have a spectacular religion. He'll just jump off! And God will save him. But religion is not spectacular. It comes ultimately to the suffering, death, and resurrection of the Lord. And he says, no. No. "Do not put the Lord, your God, to the test."

And finally, the devil gets him— wants him to worship him. And he says, "Begone, Satan." He is nothing. God is God. And the Lord rebukes him. And then the angels come to wait upon him.

And so we need to look to these two readings, and also, on this beginning of Lent, to look at prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. They help us to clear away the fog in our minds, the shadows, the illusions, all those things which can mess up our lives. We gotta see clearly. Life is too short to be tricked by the world, the flesh, and the devil. It's too short for that.

And this season of Lent is a time for us to get ready, sharpen up our perception of what is real, and banish the fog of illusion.

"From shadows and illusions, into the truth."