

18 First Sunday of Lent Year C March 10, 2019
Deuteronomy 26:4-10 Psalm 91 Romans 10:8-13 Luke 4:1-13

Today we celebrate the First Sunday in Lent. During Lent, the Church recalls two major Sacraments of Lent. The first great Sacrament of Lent is Baptism which is our initial sharing in the Paschal Mystery of Christ. In the waters of Baptism, we *die* as sinful people, then we rise to a *new life* in Christ, and we enter into the new and eternal Covenant with God.

The second great Sacrament of Lent is Reconciliation or Confession, because in our weakness we fail to keep a perfect Covenant with God after our Baptism. Penance is a living out of the Eucharistic Acclamation, "Lord, by Your cross and resurrection, You have set us free; You are the Saviour of the world." During Lent the Mass readings have been chosen with relation to the themes of Baptism and its renewal, and the theme of Penance.

To prepare ourselves, today's readings tell us that we have to be *obedient* to God by resisting the temptation to sin. In today's Gospel, before Jesus begins His mission of proclaiming the Kingdom of God, He goes into the desert to prepare Himself for His spiritual journey by fasting and praying. During the time of Lent, we also, like Jesus, enter into the desert to help us reflect on the direction our lives are taking and prepare us for our journey at the end of life through fasting and praying.

After forty days of fasting and praying, Satan tempts Jesus with the temptations of Catholics throughout the ages: to live for material things of the world alone; to seek one's own glory rather than God's glory; and to abandon the worship of God for the worship of worldly power and fame.

St. Luke writes about the temptations of Jesus so that we will know our enemy. How else will we know how to repel Satan's attacks? St. Luke is warning us that the fallen angel, the devil, is still able to gain considerable power on earth and to manipulate people to further his own agenda, to mock God and take revenge against God.

When does Satan attack *Jesus* with these temptations? When does the devil attack *us* with temptations? Satan attacks Jesus after He has spent forty days of fasting in the desert. When it is over, Jesus is tired and hungry. It is at this vulnerable point

when Satan attacks Jesus. Often the devil attacks *us* also at the most vulnerable and weakest times in our lives.

In order to get back at God, the devil tempts many people to deny God's existence. He tricks others into losing trust in God's love and goodness. Still others he simply seduces into loving themselves and material things more than they love God. Perhaps the devil tries to deceive us into worshipping idols instead of God, things like money, fame, possessions, or status. Whatever the strategy, Satan has a single goal, to pull down with him as many people as possible to his final destination of eternity in hell.

Will we succumb to Satan and his seemingly logical temptations, or will we renounce him and choose *obedience* to God's plan instead for our lives? Yielding to Satan, even in small matters, is always dangerous. Satan is completely opposed to God. The devil wants nothing more than the destruction of Christ's Church, the Pope, bishops and priests who are in the Person of Christ, families and all those who follow Christ.

Temptation *in itself* is not a sin. it becomes a sin when we give into the temptation to do something that is sinful. When tempted to sin, we must acknowledge our need to die to self, deny ourselves the satisfaction of holding on to our sin, and claim Christ's victory on the cross over every sinful tendency.

Jesus forgives us and raises us up when we fall. If we accept the challenge to die and rise with Christ, we will become His faithful followers. He enables us to obey God's Word, to trust God, and to worship God alone. God is *a/ways* with us in our struggles and helping us to overcome the temptations of sin, if we but only ask Him to help us.

On the path to spiritual maturity, even temptation can become a stepping-stone rather than a stumbling block when we realize that it is just as much an occasion to do the right thing as it is to do the wrong thing. Temptation simply provides the choice. While temptation is Satan's primary weapon to destroy us, God wants to use it to help us grow. Every time you choose to do good instead of choosing to sin, you are growing in the imitation of Christ.

In today's Gospel, Jesus proves that God is bigger than Satan. Jesus proves that as long as we have God living inside our hearts, and as long as we hold His truths

in our hearts, sin will not feel welcome in our presence. Satan will know God is living in us and he will flee. As it is stated in James 4:7: "So submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."

This is a story of what we must do when we are faced with temptation. A couple of boys decided to walk through a corral when a bull saw them and began to charge. One of the boys says, "Let stop and pray." The other boy says, "No, let's run and pray." They didn't need to resist the bull inside of the corral. They needed to run out of the area where they were vulnerable. That's what we need to do when we are being tempted. We need to flee from the temptation.

Temptations in our life are big and small and they will not go away. They are a part of life and are found everywhere. They travel with us wherever we go. Jesus' battle with Satan did not end in the desert, it continued until the Cross. Our battle with Satan will end when we die. Victory over temptations, however, is not found everywhere but comes only in Jesus Christ. The result of a serious Lent is a deeper union with the victories and Risen Christ.

In times of temptation we are called to cry out in prayer to God to help us. Remember that God has a 24/7 emergency hot line for us to call Him on. God *wants us* to ask Him for assistance in overcoming temptation. Times of prayer are at the very heart of Jesus' relationship with His Heavenly Father. God is waiting to hear our prayer to help defeat temptations.

At times we may feel embarrassed to ask God for His help because we keep giving in to the same temptation over and over again. But God never gets irritated, bored, or impatient even when we keep praying for His help. God's love is everlasting, and His patience endures forever. If we have to cry out for God's help two hundred times a day to defeat a particular temptation, He will still be eager to give His mercy and grace to help us.

Lent calls each of us to resist the temptation to sin and to seek God's grace to do so. The devil wants to draw us away from Our Lord, making things that are wrong appear desirable. In times of trial, it is the devil that tempts us to doubt, or even deny, the power and love of God. It puts us at a crossroads, "*Do we give way to Satan, or do we take a stand on the side of Jesus?*"

Lent calls us to live out our Baptismal commitment. Lent calls us to repent of our sins and seek the Divine healing of Jesus in the Sacrament of Reconciliation or Confession. Lent offers us an opportunity for silent self-examination, for looking inward in the presence of God, for listening to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, for measuring our lives against the standard of the Gospel.

Lent reminds us that Jesus wants us to be obedient to His Father. Jesus wants us to join Him someday in His Heavenly Kingdom. Put your faith in Christ's power and grace! Stand firm in your faith and be obedient to God and the devil will flee from you as he fled from Christ in the desert.

We need to take care of our soul. It is the only one we have and we want our soul to go to Heaven. Our society *will not* take care of our soul for us. We are reminded that when we were baptized, we were plucked out of the devil's grip and made into a new creation through the Blood of Christ.

Our Lenten prayer to be offered is: *Lord, throughout these forty days You fasted and prayed. Teach us to overcome our temptations, and stay close to You. As You won victory over Satan, give us the strength to fight so that we, too, may conquer temptations that lead us to sin. Amen.*