

17 First Sunday of Lent
Genesis 2:7-9,15-18,25,3:1-7

Year A
Psalm 51

March 1, 2020
Romans 5:12-19 Matthew 4:1-11

Today's First Reading from Genesis takes us back to the time of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. It tells the story of the very first sin, the *original sin*. This reading is also the story of every sin, about every person's loss of innocence.

Haven't we all experienced the same thing as Adam and Eve? There is a time of clear conscience. Then, comes a temptation, the urge to taste the forbidden fruit, to experience the unknown, to grasp for the illusion of maturity. The promise of temptation is that we will become godlike, somehow more mature, and we give in.

The temptation, big or small, promises one thing but delivers something else and we experience the fall. Maybe it happens when we had our first smoke, our first drink, our first drugs, maybe our first theft or maybe even our first infidelity. At that moment, we lost something and realized that we felt naked, like Adam and Eve did.

While it is true that God plans for the life of each one of us, we must be careful not to make it sound like God is the source of temptation or sin. St. James writes, "*No one, when tempted, should say, 'I am being tempted by God;' for God cannot be tempted by evil and He Himself tempts no one. But one is tempted by one's own desires, being lured and enticed by it*" (1:12-18).

The Gospel reading is about temptation but with a different ending. Jesus goes into the wilderness of Judea and there He also is tempted. But here the result is victory. Jesus is tempted in the desert three times and three times He wins. These are temptations we all know well.

The Gospel portrays Satan tempting Jesus with the temptations we have had over 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.

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.

Matthew wrote about the temptations of Jesus so that we will know our enemy. How else will we know how to repel Satan's attacks? Matthew 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. Satan has a single goal, to pull down with him as many people as possible to the destination of eternity in hell.

As baptized Catholics, we have been freed from original sin and its consequences. However, the inclination toward sin remains. It is part of human nature to desire what is *not* good for us. The desires themselves are not necessarily sinful, but when we give into them, they "*give birth to sin, and that sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death.*" (James 1:12-18) However, when we struggle against these temptations for love of Christ, we receive eternal life.

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, His priests, 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. Resisting temptation was not easy for Jesus; nor is it for us. But in Jesus we have a spiritual brother who knows what we are up against. The letter to the Hebrews says: "*Because Jesus Himself has suffered and been tempted, He is able to help those who are tempted*" (Hebrews 2:18).

Jesus is willing to forgive us and raise us up when we fall into temptation. He enables us to obey God's Word, to trust God, and to worship God alone. God is *always* with us in our struggles and helping us to overcome the temptations of sin.

On the path to spiritual maturity, even temptation can become a stepping-stone rather than a stumbling block when we realize that it is often 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. In James 4:7, it states: *"So submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."*

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 temptation.

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. Our victory over temptation comes through Jesus Christ.

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 pray: *Lord, throughout these forty days You fasted and prayed. Teach me to overcome my temptations and stay close to You. As You won victory over Satan, please give me the strength to also fight Satan so that I, too, may conquer any temptations that lead me to sin. Amen.*