

First Sunday of Lent

March 10, 2019

Deuteronomy 26:4-10

Romans 10:8-13

Luke 4:1-13

On this First Sunday of Lent, the scripture lessons call us to begin to ponder the mighty deeds God accomplished in Israel and the mighty deeds God accomplished in Christ Jesus. This season is all about renewing our focus, and perhaps, expanding our focus. The business of life, the daily routine, worldly distractions, all can easily diminish the spiritual in our lives. Let's begin the homily with a story that reminds us that temptation is a reality in our lives today.

A well known rabbi wished to have a glimpse into peoples' heart and to test their opinion of themselves. He invited three passers-by into his house. Turing to the first man he said, "Suppose you found a purse full of gold coins, what would you do with it?"

"I would give it to the owner right away provided, of course, I knew who the owner was," the man replied. "Fool," the rabbi exclaimed. He then put the question to the second man.

"I wouldn't give it back to the owner. I'd put it in my pocket. I am not so stupid as to let a windfall like that slip through my hands," the man replied. "Scoundrel," exclaimed the rabbi. And, then he put the question to the third man.

"How can I possibly know, rabbi, what I would do in a case like that?" The man replied. "Would I be able to conquer the evil inclination? Or would the evil urge overcome me and make me take what belongs to another? I do not know. But if the Holy One, blessed be He, strengthened me against the evil inclination, I would give back the money to its owner."

"Your words are beautiful," the rabbi exclaimed. "You are wise indeed."

The rabbi called the first man a fool. Because he presumed he would be strong enough to resist the *temptation* to keep the money. People don't fall because they are weak, they fall because they think they are strong.

The rabbi called the second man a scoundrel. Because, without the slightest qualm of conscience, he was prepared to keep what didn't belong to him. The *temptation* was an opportunity to focus on himself, to enrich himself, at the expense of another.

The third man was praised as wise and good. The rabbi found that what made him wise was the fact that he knew he was weak. He hoped that when faced with the temptation he would be strong to do the right thing. He knew he needed God and was prepared to seek God's help.

The sacred word today, especially the gospel lesson, recognizes that we are all weak and can easily fall into bad choices. We are invited to know ourselves and reaffirm our need for God's help.

In the gospel lesson we are at a profound moment at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. He has only just been baptized and the voice from heaven declares that he is the beloved son of the Father. You would think he might be able to relax but he is immediately driven into the desert. There he meets his enemy, a voice that questions his identity. "If you are the Son of God" then why are you so hungry? "If you are the Son of God" then why are the kingdoms of the world so distant from you? "If you are the Son of God" then, surely, God will rescue you!

These temptations were a moment of clarification where Jesus could truly become focused on his calling. Faithfulness to God was his first priority and what was to follow was Jesus' full entry into our human lives. Through his presence among us, through his ministry of healing and preaching, Jesus would bring us a freedom and the fulness of life.

This Lenten Season calls us to focus on the font. Yes, we have been baptized, and our hope is that this year we will be more baptized than ever into Christ Jesus.

Presider: We come before you, God of mercy, with our troubles and temptations, trusting you will strengthen us and answer our prayers. Our response: O God, come and help us!

1. For the church universal: for Pope Francis' health and intentions; / for healing of all divisions within and between Christians: We pray ...
2. For a spirit of cooperation between nations; / safety for those fleeing oppression and danger; / and for policies and borders that welcome the stranger: / We pray ...
3. For all who are incarcerated; for those imprisoned by addictions to drugs, alcohol, gambling, or technology; for adequate funding in the treatment processes; and for healing for all victims: / We pray ...
4. For us as we begin this Lenten journey; / for strength to overcome temptations that hurt our relationship with God, others and creation; / for reconciliation of all broken relationships; / and for a greater awareness of Jesus' presence in our lives: / We pray ...
5. For a greater appreciation for the "milk and honey" that flows through all creation; / for a stronger desire to protect our natural resources; / for a deeper awareness to see the interconnectedness of all life: / We pray ...
6. For the sick, the dying, and for all who have died, / especially Dorothy Noel _____: / We pray ...

The parish community would like to support you in prayer.
Please share with us your needs and intentions.

Presider: O God, we call out to you. Hear our cry and see our affliction. Help us journey this Lent to a closer walk with thee. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.