

## First Sunday Of Lent

## Father Ed's Homily

### Theme: Jesus' Temptation and Victory over the Devil will help us also in our Temptation & Victory

**W**ith the celebration of Ash Wednesday on Feb 22, this year, we started our Lenten season which runs from Ash Wednesday until the Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday. As a gentle reminder, Lent is a forty-day liturgical season of fasting, special prayer, and almsgiving in preparation for Easter. In the Ceremonial of Bishops, 249, it is beautifully explained: "The annual observance of Lent is the special season for the ascent to the holy mountain of Easter. Through its twofold theme of repentance and baptism, the season of Lent disposes both the catechumens and the faithful to celebrate the paschal mystery. Catechumens are led to the sacraments of initiation by means of the rite of election, the Scrutinies, and catechesis. The faithful, listening more intently to the word of God and devoting themselves to prayers, are prepared through a spirit of repentance to renew their baptismal promises."

The First Sunday of Lent invites us to reflect on the temptation of Jesus and his victory over the devil in the desert. This year, we read the temptation of Jesus from the Gospel of Matthew which is almost identical with that of Luke's Gospel. The temptation of Jesus narrated by the Gospel writers should not be taken literally. They tried to help us understand the reality of temptation and sin, and as followers of Jesus Christ, we are bound to face both in our daily life. The temptation of Jesus is about him making a right decision/choice. That is, obeying his heavenly Father with regard to his mission here on earth or disobeying Him and following the devil/Satan's mission. God has given us also a free will/freedom to obey Him and have eternal life or disobey Him meaning obey Satan and bound to hell.

St. Matthew tells us that Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, when the devil, Satan tempted him three times. St. Matthew, reflecting on the words of Jesus in his heart, meditates on the significant meaning of the three typical temptations that constantly threaten the followers of Jesus Christ, namely God should not be used for one's own gain or profit (turning stones into bread). Secondly, faith has nothing to do with the spectacular (throw yourself down). Lastly, religion must not be mixed up with political power (kingdoms displayed in their magnificence). Satan is aware of human beings always want power, honor, and glory that belong to God alone, since the beginning of creation has been tempting us. We heard it in the first reading. Our first parents, Adam and Eve, failed because they wanted the honor, power, and glory that belongs to God alone.

St. Paul, in the second reading, reflecting on the sin of Adam (Gn 3:1-3) in the light of the redemptive mystery of Christ, draws up an analogy between the Adam of Genesis and Jesus Christ. He says Adam began a history of fallen humanity, marked by sin and death. On the other hand, Jesus Christ came and began a new history of humanity marked by forgiveness of sin and everlasting life.

Yes, thanks be to God, Jesus Christ, the new Adam who was tempted but did not sin, has redeemed us for God. Jesus did so through constant, continued prayer, fasting, and total fidelity to the Word of God. By this, Jesus has shown us the best way to fight Satan and his empty promises(temptations). Beloved, the temptation of Jesus lasted throughout his earthly life. If you read Luke's version of the temptation account, Luke reminds us of this fact: "When the devil had finished every temptation, he departed from him for a time" (Luke 4: 13). Meaning, the devil did not end his temptation in the desert with Jesus. Satan just took a break for now. You remember how the devil/Satan followed Jesus even to the Cross on that Good Friday. Satan tried one more time, but he failed. How did the devil do this? The Word of God tells us on the Cross: "...one of the criminals hanging there reviled Jesus, saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us." You see, how Satan works? Right! My dear people of God, as disciples of Jesus Christ, our enemy, the devil/Satan will tempt us also throughout our earthly life. Prayer, fasting, and almsgiving should not be practiced only in Lenten Season but throughout our earthly life. In praying the 'Hail Mary', we are reminded to also ask Mother Mary to please: "PRAY FOR US SINNERS, NOW AND AT THE HOUR OF OUR DEATH." Yes, Mother should pray for us now and at the hour death. My pastoral work with the dying has truly helped me to appreciate better this prayer of Mother Mary. There are some folks dying, and it is like they are going on a beautiful journey. They are not afraid at all. I well remember, a lady dying and how she wished goodbye in a beautiful way to her family. She then called upon Mother Mary and saints to welcome her home. She died peacefully. On the other hand, some folks dying can be very frightened to witness.

My dear people of God, on Ash Wednesday, one of the prayer formulas we used reads: "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return." It reminds us of our mortality. Like our divine Master, Jesus Christ, let us also hold on to constant, continued prayer, fasting, and fidelity to the Word of God so that we will win the temptation over Satan and his empty promises. With the grace of God and the intercession of Mother Mary and her beloved husband Joseph, we will successfully win the temptation over evil until our last breath and meet our Savior Jesus Christ and all our loved ones who had gone before us. Amen!