

## First Sunday of Lent

Readings Deut 26: 4-10; Rom 10:8-13 & Lk 4:1-13

Theme: "When the devil had finished every temptation, he departed from him for a time."- Lk4:13

With the celebration of Ash Wednesday on March 5, we began our Lenten journey towards Easter. Many of us will remember that every year, we begin our Lenten season with the Temptation of Jesus in the wilderness/desert. All the synoptic Gospel authors have recorded these triple temptation accounts of Jesus by the devil/Satan in the desert (Lk 4:1-13, Mk 4:12-13 & Mt 4:1-11).

Holy Mother Church asks us, her children, to start our Lenten journey towards the celebration of Easter and to remind us that, as Christians, we will also experience temptations like Jesus Christ, our divine Master. We're not shielded from Satan's temptation. Jesus is an excellent model for us to follow in our pilgrimage to heaven. Through prayer, fasting, and trusting in his heavenly Father, Jesus was able to win victory over Satan and all his empty promises and had successfully accomplished the mission his heavenly Father had called him to do.

Luke tells us, "Filled with Holy Spirit, Jesus returned from Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert for forty days, to be tempted by the devil." In Biblical tradition, "forty" refers to a sufficiently long period of time. Jesus followed the pattern which God had set for Moses and Elijah. Moses and Elijah went on a forty-day journey of prayer and fasting to meet with God on his holy mountain (Ex 24:18 and 1Kg 19: 8). Their solitude with God helped them to be renewed in faith, courage, hope, and love for the vocation God had called them to do. So, Jesus also spending 40 days in the desert was meant to prepare him for the mission God called him to do.

The first temptation of Jesus, according to Luke, was that Satan, an expert on Scripture, asked if Jesus is the Son of God to turn stone to become bread (Psalm 91). Jesus refused it and reminded Satan also that in Scripture, it is said that one does not live on bread alone (Book of Deuteronomy). Here, Jesus wants Satan and all of us to know that bread/material things do not give us lasting peace and happiness. True happiness and peace can only be found in the Word of God, not in food/material things.

Then, Satan, not giving up on Jesus, took Jesus and showed him all the Kingdoms of this world and asked if only he will only bow down and worship him, he will put Jesus in charge of all these kingdoms. Jesus again defeated Satan by referring him to Scripture where it is written, "You shall worship the Lord, your God, and him alone you serve." Again, Jesus reminds Satan and all of us that true lasting happiness, joy, and peace can never be found in wealth, fame, and power except in God alone.

During the third temptation, Satan led Jesus to Jerusalem where he made him stand on the parapet of the temple and again quoted Scripture to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you, and with their hands they will support you." Jesus again defeated Satan with a Bible quotation, "It also says, you shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test." The lesson here is that Jesus wants Satan and all of us to know that he is not a political messiah, but a spiritual Messiah. He will use love, not power, to bring God's children back to him. He does not have to perform spectacular things for people to follow him. By his words and actions, they will believe he is truly the Messiah, the Son of God, and many people will come to know God. As followers of Jesus, we shall also go through temptations if we want to be his true witnesses in this world. Remember, Satan came to Jesus at the end of Jesus' forty days of prayer and fasting when he was vulnerable physically and emotionally drained by the scorching sun, fasting, and praying in the desert for 40 days.

That was when Satan knew he could get Jesus to choose between his way or God's way. Satan will also come to us when we're emotionally, physically, and spiritually drained for us to decide to follow our way/Satan or God's way. Through prayer, fasting, and charitable acts, the Holy Spirit will guide us always to choose God's way/will and not our ways or Satan's ways.

Again, it is interesting to know that all three temptations point to these things, namely, material things, power, and self-glory first, and then spiritual things and God second. We have to remember always to put God first in our life.

I intentionally chose this theme, "When the devil had finished every temptation, he departed from him for a time." Luke wants us to know that the temptation of Jesus did not end in the desert. Satan continued to

tempt Jesus throughout his earthly ministry until Jesus died on the Cross. Scripture tells us that when Jesus was on the cross in Jerusalem, he again encountered temptation of Satan like those in Luke 4 :1-13 we read today. You remember, one of the criminals besides Jesus on the cross asked him if he is the Son of God to save himself and save both of them/criminals. Yes, we will also go through temptations until we give our last breath. Let us not be afraid because with our faith in Jesus, he will help us also to win victory over Satan and his empty promises.

This faith in Jesus is what St. Paul talks about in the second reading. Paul reminds us that no one who truly believes in Jesus will be put to shame.

The first reading gives us an account of a ritual ceremony where the ancient Israelites brought the first fruits of their harvest to God. This is to remind them the blessings God has showered upon them and to be very grateful to him. Like the Israelites, we also must be very grateful to God to be in this country. We must thank God every day for all his blessings to us.

At the end of the Mass, we shall invite three candidates (Dee Dee, Tammy and her son Brogan Malcolm) from our Order of Christian initiation of adults (OCIA) class to the altar. Tomorrow, God willing, these three candidates with their sponsors and teachers will go to the cathedral in Charleston where they will join other candidates for the Rite of Election that Bishop Mark will celebrate. This will qualify them to be accepted into the Church on Easter Vigil. I am very grateful to Mary, Brenda, Doris, and the entire team of our School of Religion.