

FR. JOHN'S HOMILY

First Sunday of Lent, March 6, 2022

The season of Lent is a time to renew our intention of living more completely for Christ. What can I do to grow closer to God and toward others, especially for my family, during this Lenten season?

One thing we will all face when making a commitment to prayer, fasting, and almsgiving this Lent is Temptation. You may not feel it now, but it will come. In thoughts like, I don't feel like praying today, why bother, I will make it up later today. Or, it won't hurt to cheat a little on my fast, just this one time, I will make up for it later. Can you see the thought pattern? Remember this Lenten season is growing in our love for God and for others, this Lenten season is about pursuing this direction in our lives, for the whole 40 days. So how are you doing the first few days in? To help us on our journey we hear of Jesus temptations in the desert. We turn to Jesus to ask Him to help us on our Lenten journey of praying, fasting and almsgiving, especially when it comes to our times of temptation.

Jesus, desiring to share in our human condition in all things but sin, was tempted. He was tempted many times and in many ways, but He learned to resist them. He overcame all temptations by choosing to trust in His Heavenly Father completely. Yes, it is true that Jesus is divine, the Son of God, therefore He had strength to overcome all temptations because of His power. However you must also know and realize Jesus experienced our humanity completely. He was tempted like us in all things. St. Paul wrote: "Christ humbled himself and took on the form of a servant." Why? To fully partake in our human condition, even in trial and temptation in order to raise our fallen nature to share in God's life, forever.

The Gospel of Luke tells us that Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness, into the desert for forty days and nights in prayer and fasting. Jesus follows the pattern of other servants of God, like Abraham and Moses, even the Israelites as a people and Elijah the prophet. Jesus will be no exception to those who are put to the test, not in order to trip them up, but to demonstrate that it is God who is in control, who can overcome evil and become victorious in seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

Jesus is the supreme model of this lesson, whose obedience to the will of the Father meant overthrowing the evil one who held everyone captive to sin and fear of death. The obedience of Jesus shown in embracing the cross reversed the disobedience of God's first humans, Adam and Eve described in the Book Genesis. What they could not resist Jesus does. The victory of Christ over sin and death likewise won for the human race not only pardon for sin, but also adoption as God's sons and daughters.

Satan begins, in the first temptation, when Jesus is physically hungry after prayer and fasting, by suggesting to Jesus that he should use his powers to feed himself. Turn the stones into bread. Jesus will be tempted by Satan with this use of Power throughout His earthly life. Remember it is always at His weakest moments – after fasting 40 days, long days of ministry, dying on the cross- use you powers for yourself. Jesus never did.

Listen to how Jesus answers Satan. From the Book of Deuteronomy which includes the notion that God fed his children in the wilderness with manna, something new and strange, desiring that the people understand that it is not on bread alone that man lives, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God. And later we will hear from Jesus, "I myself am the bread which came down from heaven," Jesus will be the one to feed us and give us strength on our journey of faith.

Satan is relentless and continues to try to lead Jesus astray, away from the narrow path, the difficult course that God has planned for his mission. But Jesus is not moved by the devil to do other than the Father's will, even if that means suffering and death.

Satan turns this defeat into a means of attack in the second temptation. If Jesus trusted that the Father would not let him starve, why should Jesus not show even greater trust and prostrate yourself in homage before me, and all the kingdoms of the world shall be yours? Jesus answers this temptation with another quote from Deuteronomy, "You shall do homage to the Lord your God; him alone shall you adore." Jesus will worship only His Father in heaven, there will be no other.

Finally, the devil takes Jesus to absurd heights and tries to get the Lord to throw himself from the parapet of the temple, entrusting himself into the hands of the angels, but Jesus counters with, "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test."

Jesus' resolve is unshaken to do God's will. Jesus does not give in to the devil who finally leaves Jesus for a while to look for other opportunity to ensnare Him, like in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the cross. In His weakest and most vulnerable times, Satan attacks. He is evil. So when we find ourselves weak and tired, be very careful and cautious. Let us learn to rely upon Jesus.

Jesus stand for us all; He defeated Satan in rejecting the way of comfort and ease, prestige and power, success and praise. Instead, he chose the way of becoming the Suffering Servant out of love for you and me. In so doing, Jesus won for us the ability to share in divine life.

What Jesus shows us in the desert is the ideal of every Christian life: complete service of God, living the Gospel without compromise. That is certainly what our Christian call requires of us to be authentic and faithful in our following of Jesus Christ.

As we receive the Lord, may we learn from Him and be vigilant and reject all that is contrary to the Gospel, by the power of the Holy Spirit working in our lives!