

First Sunday of Lent A-2020: Temptation

They had lost their innocence. The first effects of their sin was that their eyes were opened, and they realized that they were naked. Of course I am speaking about Adam and Eve in the account of the Original Sin. Adam and Eve could no longer be comfortable with themselves. They ate from tree of knowledge of good and evil, and now they had knowledge of evil. In Scripture to know means to experience. Adam and Eve had an experience of evil. It was horrible. They were exposed, vulnerable, full of guilt, full of shame. Their choice of sin was a turning away from the Lord of Life. They chose that which is not life. They chose death. And all mankind suffered the result of their choice. All people would suffer from sin and the result of sin, death.

We experience this suffering every day of our lives, as good people, innocent people, die. We experience this as our children are assaulted by the media, by the immoral aspects of society, by all who would take advantage of them. We experience this as evil grabs people and chokes the joy for life from them. We experience this as we also suffer the results of evil that we have committed as well as suffer from what others have done. Sin makes us all uncomfortable with ourselves.

But, St. Paul tells the Romans, and us, just as sin and death came into the world through the actions of one man, Adam, grace and life has come into the world through the actions of another, Jesus Christ. What Christ has brought into the world, His Grace, is infinitely more powerful than the hideous power of sin.

Jesus first demonstrated His power over evil when He defeated the devil and the diabolical temptations after His forty days in the desert. We can see the beginning petitions of the Lord's Prayer in Jesus' response to the devil. Jesus would seek His bread from God, not from the world; and He taught us also to pray to God for our daily bread. Jesus would seek the will of God and not impose His will upon His Father. He would not jump from the parapet of the Temple as an attempt to force the Father into action. He taught us to pray, "Thy will be done," not my will, but your will, Loving Father. In the third temptation, Jesus would not be bribed with all the riches of the world, all the kingdoms of the world, given to Him for rebelling against the Father. There is only one Kingdom that mattered. He taught us to pray, "Thy Kingdom come."

We are all tempted to sin. That is part of life. But we can defeat temptation. In some ways we all experience each of the temptations that the devil put before the Lord. The devil wanted Jesus to trust in His own power, rather than the Father. He wanted him to change rocks into bread. We also are tempted to trust in ourselves instead of trust in God. During the colonial and frontier days, Americans established the tradition of rugged individualism that became part of our national identity. But even the early settlers recognized that their strength came from God, not from themselves. I just finished reading David McCullough's book, *The Pioneers*. It's a good read, but McCullough gives little account to the fact that most of the pioneers were people of deep faith; seeking God's protection and love, thanking Him for caring for them in many ways.

We cannot fall for the temptation to think that we can do everything ourselves. We have to trust in God. We have to have faith. Yes, we must do our best to provide for our future that of our loved ones, but, ultimately, we rely on the Lord to care for us. We can resist the temptation to push God out of our lives. This call to faith is not always that easy. In fact, it is usually quite difficult. It is quite difficult to spend so much time and energy on a child, or on a situation, for example a career, and then trust the future to God rather than to ourselves. We do our best to raise our children, but then we entrust them to God. A career opportunity comes up. We pray to God for help. We do our due diligence, make a career choice, and then trust in God.

It is tempting to think that we do not need God. In fact, that is the temptation of the atheistic elements of the world. The so-called intellectual elite often mock people of faith, belittling us for believing in God and asserting that they have wonderful lives without God. And then they write books about the quiet desperation of everyday man. We cannot allow these fools to sway us. We know that we need God. We cannot survive without God. We cannot be happy without Him. And we cannot live forever without Him. "I am a self-made man," the old gent boasted. "Really," the priest responded, "It took God a full day to create Adam, how many days did it take you to create yourself?"

Like Jesus' second temptation, we are tempted to force God into action instead of simply trusting in Him to care for us. We may not be standing on the edge of a building deciding that God must save us if we jump, but we may be toying with that which can destroy us, alcohol, sex, drugs, etc, and think, erroneously, that if we fall God will catch us. We may be living on the edge. It is presumption to think that God will take care of us if we live rejecting the way of life he has given us. God is All-Merciful, true, but He is also All Just. We trust in God, but, as Jesus told the devil, we don't put God to a test. We have to resist the temptation to live life on the edge because if we slip, we fall into eternal death.

And like Jesus, we can fight the temptation to be bought by the world. There are many people who have sold their souls for wealth and power. The devil tempts us to join those who do evil, tune down or turn off our consciences, and reap wealth beyond our imaginations. There is a lot of money to be made selling contraband, a lot of money to be made working in the low industries of our society, a lot of money to be made cheating our way to the top of the business world, but we refuse to sell our souls to the devil. We live for One and One only. We live for our Heavenly Father, not for ourselves. The goal of our lives is not to amass a fortune. The goal of our lives is to live for God. We have bought into the Kingdom, not sold our souls to the world, or to the devil, often the same thing.

At the end of the Gospel Satan left Jesus, and the angels came to administer to Him. There are angels here. Not just our children, but real spiritual beings. How many are in this building right now? How many angels are in our homes? The angels are our protectors and our spiritual care givers. They will minister to us also as we join the Lord in the fight against evil. We are warriors in the battle of the Lord against the

power of the devil. We don't fight alone. The Lord and His forces fight with us. In Chris Tomlin's song *Whom Should I Fear*, he sings about the God of angel armies always by our sides. ©CCLI License #2368115

We ask the Lord today to protect us from the temptations of the world, lead us not into temptation, and to deliver us from evil, the evil one, the evil around us, and the evil within us. And we trust in God for we know that we are loved; for as St. Paul says in the *First Letter to the Corinthians*, we have been purchased, and at what a price! (1 Cor 6:20)