

First Sunday in Lent

We are now into the great season of Lent. It is important for us to realize that our life is a journey towards God and to prepare ourselves to receive him fully. During the season of Lent, the church invites us to examine our lives, to repent of our sins and do penance. By means of fasting, penance and prayers, the faithful obtain strength they need to overcome the sinful tendencies. The purpose of Lent is to provide that purification by preventing human persons from sin and selfishness through self-denial and prayer, by creating in them the desire to do God's will and to make his kingdom alive by making it first come into their hearts. The real aim of Lent is to prepare Christians for the celebration of the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. The better the preparation for this day, the more effective the celebration will be. One can effectively relive the mystery only with purified mind and heart. The Church invites us to repent.

Today's Gospel tells us of the triumph of Jesus in the desert. All the temptations Jesus undergoes in the desert call for the misuse of his power as messiah and Son of God. The mission given by the Father was to suffer and die and thus save the world. The evil one shows devious ways and wants Jesus to use his power to self-fulfillment and external show. Led by the Spirit in the wilderness, Jesus resisted the three temptations that were placed before Him. His temptations make it clear that Jesus was fully human as well as divine.

The episode also tells us that what happened to Jesus will happen to us and we too can be tempted at any time. Through Jesus and with Him, we are reminded that we too can be triumphant in our battle against evil. The temptations placed before Jesus highlight the kind of ministry and mission he is about to begin. It will tell us what kind of leader he is going to be. He will not be someone who offers instant enjoyment, one who looks for all encompassing political power, or who dazzles his followers through his miraculous or dazzling powers. Instead Jesus will model compassion, gentleness and humility. He will be a servant leader who will not hesitate to wash the feet of his disciples. He will be a leader and a king on the cross.

In fact, all three temptations of Jesus are all rolled into one: to be unfaithful to the mission of the Father. The Father had given him the mission to redeem the world through his life, suffering and death on the cross. Satan now shows him the easy way to fulfill his mission. He need not go the hard way but take the easy path. Jesus refuses to surrender to the temptations and takes the path of God. The last sentence of today's Gospel tells us: "The devil left him to return at the appointed time." The battle with evil was not over for Jesus. It will occur again and again at various stages in his life, right up to and especially at those last hours in the garden and on the Cross. For us, too, the battle against evil never stops. The selfishness, the greed, the anger and hostility, the jealousy and resentment, above all the desire are our temptations.

Our only success in life can be what we achieve in building a society that is more loving and just, based on the message of Jesus, a message of truth and integrity, of love and compassion, of freedom and peace. Thus the tempter leaves him for a while and he will come again and again to tempt him during his life. This in fact is the human situation. We too are constantly led to the temptation and we can overcome this with the grace of God. Satan, through these temptations, tries to divert Jesus from his proper mission, which is that of leading all souls to the Kingdom of God. Jesus is the Servant of God par excellence: he is at the service of the Father who wants to save everyone.

Finally Luke tells us that Jesus is the model for resisting the temptations by being faithful and committed to the Gospel and refusing to put God to the test. God appoints a certain time for everything. It is only when he decides to do a certain thing that it is actually realized, and not before or after. Now, it was not yet the time of God when the devil used God's own words, written in the Holy Scriptures, in tempting Jesus for the third time. It is true that God will charge his angels with taking care of Christ, but only when his hour has come. When Jesus will say to his Father: "Father, the hour has come; glorify thy Son that the Son may glorify thee..." (Jn. 17:1), that will be the hour of the will of God, and the Father will send his angels to his Son. In the meantime, Jesus replies to the devil: "You shall not tempt the Lord your God." That

is, you will not try to make him act before his time. “And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.” (Lk. 4:13).