

February 26, 2023
Cycle A – 1st Sunday of Lent

Genesis 2:7-9; 3:1-7

Psalm: 51:3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 17

Romans 5:12-19

Matthew 4:1-11

Notes from Bishop Peter

THEME: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord alone.
Therefore you must love the Lord your God with all your heart,
with all your soul and all your strength...”

1. Heart refers to two drives – good and evil. Soul means life, even martyrdom and strength means wealth, property and other possessions. (Cf. Jerome Biblical Commentary, p.638, on Mt. 4:1-11)
2. Genesis: Devil is the father of lies and makes evil seem good. We never choose evil for evil’s sake. We choose it because it seems good somehow to us.
 - a. Pits Adam and Eve against God thus causing a division between Creator and creatures. “I will not serve. I’ll do it my way!”
 - Adam and Eve want to be like God. Jesus, who is God’s Son, empties himself and humbles himself. CF Philippians 2:6-11
 - b. Father Thomas Merton’s description of Original Sin: “I am born selfish. I am born self-centered and that is original sin.”
 - c. Now human nature is inclined toward evil, for example the Seven Capital Sins or seven inclinations toward evil from which all other sins flow: Pride, envy, anger, laziness, greed, gluttony and lust.
 - d. It is important that we cannot save ourselves. Salvation has to come from outside of us, from Jesus. This was the central error of Marxism.
 - e. God’s amazing plan – to send his Son who will become a man like us in all things. He will save us from ourselves.
 - f. This is ongoing – consider all the havoc humans have wreaked on other humans – Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Putin, etc.

3. THE THREE TEMPTATIONS: THE DEVIL TRIES TO DISSUADE JESUS FROM HIS MISSION, TO BE UNFAITHFUL TO THE FATHER AS WERE A & E.

- All three temptations are areas we struggle with as well. If we give in, our false self becomes inflated and we make ourselves the center of the universe. This leads to a deterioration of our true selves and to using others for our own benefit. The antidote: Keep our eyes fixed on Jesus and his faithfulness to his Father.
- a. The devil asks, “If you are the Son of God, command that these stones be changed into bread. To be “Son of God” means here the leader of Israel...
- Jesus is hungry – why that obvious detail? Adoptionism, a heresy in the early church. Jesus was born and died a man. When he was baptized, the Son of God took over but left him as he faced his passion. No, said the Church. From his conception, Jesus Christ is God and man.
 - This would be an abuse of power. Jesus, however, never used his powers for himself. On the contrary, he obeys his Father, trusting that the Father will take care of him and he does by sending Jesus his angels.
 - In the context of the Old Testament, the children of Israel grumbled against God in the desert. Even though they didn’t trust God, God who is rich in mercy sends manna that sustains them.
 - Examples of the abuse of power: a father who beats his wife and children, those who destroy others’ self-esteem to gain control over them, dictators, those who resort to military strength before exhausting all peaceful means of resolving conflicts. And the list goes on and on.
- b. Throw yourself down from the parapet (the outer wall) of the Temple. Devil quotes Psalm 91: 11-12
- Jesus’ response – “You will not put the Lord, your God, to the test.” The temptation: If you jump, Jesus, God will have to send his angels and all the people will cheer and they will follow you!
 - This is the temptation to give into the inclination to prestige. This can be subtle and we must be so careful. To make more and more money so that I can live in a prestigious neighborhood, drive a prestigious car, join a prestigious club, have prestigious friends and boast about all this.
 - Careful of the false self- the ego – making the love of money as one’s objective in life. This leads to using others for one’s own ends, even destroying them.

c. Possessions – Devil quotes Deuteronomy 6:13.

- Make an end run around the cross so that I can be king of the world.
- Jesus will become king but only after going through his passion.
- Possessions – those who believe that to have more is to be more. Making possessions the objective of one's life, like the second temptation. Greed! The antidote is generosity, to move out of ourselves as we see the suffering of people whose basic needs are not being met.

4. CONCLUSIONS

- a. To admire Jesus who knows our life and who overcame temptation so we could do this as well. Also, temptations are not sins because Jesus was tempted but never sinned.
- b. Examine our conscience. Am I being tempted in the areas of the abuse of power, prestige and possessions?
- c. The objective is to become the best persons we can by letting Jesus live his life in our hearts and souls with greater and greater freedom.
- d. Pray for the gifts of humility and generosity.
- e. Finally, make God the center of our life as did Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

Amen.