

HOMILY for 1st SUNDAY of LENT – Year A

This Sunday's Readings talk about temptations by the Devil. As I ponder on that, I'm reminded of this cute story to share with you.

A pastor cancels his church services one Sunday to go bear hunting in the mountains. As he turns the corner along the path, he & a bear collide. The pastor stumbles backwards, slips off the trail, & begins tumbling down the mountain with the bear in hot pursuit. Finally, the pastor crashes into a boulder, sending his rifle flying in one direction & breaking both of his legs. The pastor is lying there; he's lost his gun, & the bear is coming closer. So, he cries out in desperation, "Lord, I repent for all I've done, especially for skipping Sunday church service. Please make this bear a Christian." The bear skids to a halt at the pastor's feet, falls to its knees, clasps its paws together, & says, "Bless us, O Lord, & this thy gift which I'm about to receive from thy bounty through Christ our Lord. Amen!"

As you can see, nothing good would come from skipping Sunday church service. Anyway, this Sunday the Church celebrates the first Sunday of Lent to help us usher in a new liturgical season & call us to come home to God. We might have forgotten about our relationship with God for some reason, or neglected our spiritual life because we have been preoccupied with something else. Lenten season is the time for us to reexamine our spiritual life & see what we need to change to help us be a better Christian/Catholic. To help us take a serious examination of our spiritual life, this Sunday's first Reading & Gospel share with us two stories of temptation in the Bible: one from the Old Testament & the other the New Testament.

We might assume that Jesus would not be tempted because of His divine power & nature. The Devil would not dare to try its luck on luring the Son of God to its side. It would be wasting its time & effort to succeed on that mission. But, in reality, the Devil does not spare anyone, including the Son of God. Today's Gospel shares with us how the Devil tempted Jesus as following, "Jesus was led into the desert by the spirit to be tempted by the Devil. He fasted forty days & forty nights, & afterward was hungry. The tempter approached & said to Him, 'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to turn into bread,'" It goes on, "...Next, the Devil took Him to the holy city, set Him on the parapet of the Temple & said, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. Scripture has it: He will bid his angels to take care of you; with their hands they will support you that you may never stumble on a stone.'...Then, the Devil took Jesus to a lofty mountain peak & displayed before Him all the kingdoms of the world in their magnificence, promising, 'All these will I bestow on you if you prostrate yourself in homage before me.'" As you can see, the Devil tempted Jesus non-stop & used every trick in the book to get Jesus to its side. It used food, faith in God, & wealth & power to get Jesus to do what it wanted. What fascinates me the most about the Gospel story is that the Devil knew Scriptures pretty well. So, do not assume that only holy people read Scriptures & know about God's Commandments & church tradition because the Devil does too.

We often make wrong assumptions & think that the Devil would not tempt some people or do certain things. Because those particular biases of ours might allow the Devil to get away with lots of crazy & sneaky acts. For example, we might think that the Devil could not be found in the holy city of Jerusalem or at the top of the Temple. But, today's Gospel tells us that the Devil took Jesus there to tempt Him. It used those holy places to test Jesus' relationship with God the Father. It called on Jesus to hurt Himself intentionally & see if God the Father would

come to save Him. Similarly, some of us might assume that the Devil would not dare to enter a holy place like this church & tempt us. But, we know that the Devil has been active here every minute to distract us with all kinds of weird ideas & cause us to question our relationship with God. Furthermore, in the last decade or so, the Devil has stirred up many violent & senseless acts to happen at the Temples, mosques, churches, & other peaceful places. It seems like the Devil does not spare any place or anyone from its evil touch. It wants to turn God's whole Creation into a world of darkness. It hopes to upend the beautiful order that God has brought to our world & turn everything into chaos. So, it is very important for us to stop the work of the Devil by not collaborating with it. If we try to make it difficult for the Devil to recruit us & use us for its evil acts like Jesus did in today's Gospel, I believe that we would see less acts of hate & violence in our world.

Most of us have not seen the Devil in person with two horns & a long tail. If that has ever happened, we all would have to run for our life because of fear. None of us would want to hang around a strange-looking creature like that. But, you know that the Devil is much more cunning & devious. It usually impersonates someone close to us & pretends to do what we like to tempt us. That is how it tricks us & lures us to its dark side. Here is how today's first Reading describes the Devil: "...Now the serpent was the most cunning of all the animals that the Lord God had made. The serpent said to the woman, 'Did God really tell you not to eat from any of the trees in the garden? ...You certainly will not die! No, God knows well that the moment you eat of it you will be like gods who know what is good & what is bad.'" So, the Devil took on the form of a snake to tempt Eve & then used her to lure Adam to its dark side. It stroked Eve's ego to desire to be gods, & make her question God's command. Then, it got her to be the bad influence on her spouse. That is how the Devil spreads its bad influence & lures people to its side. We often think that our family & friends cannot be working for the Devil & pushing us to the dark side. But, we have seen how Eve & the snake did to lure Adam away from God. If we are not careful, each of us here might suffer the same fate & get lured to the dark side by our family, friends, or neighbors. Or worst yet, we might become an instrument of the Devil & do a lot of its work without realizing it.

My dear brothers & sisters, we might not see the Devil in person with two horns & a long tail. But, we can feel its presence & bad influences every day. Lately, with all the hate & senseless violence happening around the world, if we do not believe in the presence of the Devil in our world before, we would now. Believe me, it has worked overtime day & night to lure us & the whole world to its dark side. Today, the beginning of Lent, we're called to be like Jesus & resist all the daily temptations of the Devil. We're also asked to act contrary to Eve & stop being the bad influence of the dark side to the people around us. If we can do that, then we are ready to walk this Lenten journey with Jesus & push back the mission & all the bad influences of the Devil in our world.