

HOMILY for 1st SUNDAY of LENT – Year C

This Sunday tells us how Jesus was led into the desert & tempted by the Devil. Reflecting on that, I'm reminded of this cute story that I'd like to share with you.

One morning the Devil decided to go to church. He appeared suddenly, just before the gift offering, in a shower of flame and sparks & smoke. He ran up & down the aisle screaming, & all of the congregation ran out except for an old man sitting in back. The Devil leaned over him, shook his spear, let out a ferocious roar, & cried, "I am Satan, Beelzebub, the Prince of Darkness. I am evil incarnate. Do you not fear me, sir?"

The old man calmly said, "Why should I? Been married to your sister for forty-eight year!"

Anyway, this Sunday the Church invites us to celebrate a new season of Lent. In this season, we are called to pick up our daily Crosses & walk the journey of the Cross with our Lord. For we do not want Jesus to carry the Cross & walk that journey all by Himself. After all, He took up the Cross to suffer for our sins & promised us a place in Heaven. But, Jesus had to prepare Himself for the journey of the Cross & commit Himself to finish it. Otherwise, He might not have enough strength & courage to carry His Cross & might have to give up half way through that journey. That is why this Sunday's Gospel lets us know how Jesus examined His spiritual life & confronted all the possible demons that might tempt Him to run away from the journey of the Cross & abandon it.

We were told that the Spirit led Jesus into the desert to spend some quiet time in prayer & examine His spiritual life. After spending forty days in the desert, Jesus was hungry & had to face the temptation of food. Here is how this Sunday's Gospel tells us about that, "...Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert for forty days, where He was tempted by the Devil. During that time, He ate nothing; & at the end of it He was hungry. The Devil said to Him, 'If you are the Son of God, command this stone to turn into bread.' Jesus answered, 'Scripture has it, 'Not on bread alone shall human live.'"' As you can see, Jesus fasted for forty days in the desert & had to face the demon of hunger. The Devil knew that He would need food & thought that He would do anything to satisfy that demon inside of Him. The Devil knew who Jesus was & tempted Him to use His divine power to turn a stone into a loaf of bread. But, Jesus was able to overcome that temptation & remind the Devil that human beings need more than bread to survive. Here Jesus might have given us the real solution for our current problem of mental health. He wanted to remind us that we should rely more on spiritual food to nourish & strengthen us. That is how we could deal with the demon of hunger & problem of mental health mentioned a lot in our time.

However, the Devil did not stop at that first temptation. It went on to tempt Jesus with power & wealth as being reported in this Sunday's Gospel this way: "...The Devil took Jesus up higher & showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a single instant. It said to Him, 'I will give you all this power & the glory of these kingdoms; the power has been given to me & I give it to whomever I wish. Prostrate yourself in homage before me, & it shall all be yours.' In reply, Jesus said to it, 'Scripture has it, 'You shall do homage to the Lord your God; Him alone shall you adore.'"' Evidently the Devil wanted to tempt Jesus with power & wealth by showing Jesus all the kingdoms of the world & promising to give Him all of them if He would worship it. That is how most human beings would do without realizing the consequences of their action. But,

Jesus would not do that & would warn the Devil & everyone from worshipping idols such as power & wealth. For He knew that those idols easy come & easy go & would disappoint Him. He wanted to worship & remain loyal to His one faithful God the Father. Unfortunately, our world loves to worship idols & would do anything to get more power & wealth. In fact, I know many people of our time would sell their souls to the Devil to have even minutes of fame without any problem. No wonder why our current world sometimes feels like Hell – the Devil’s home – with all the chaos & senseless violence.

After failing to tempt Jesus twice on worldly things, the Devil got personal & decided to put Jesus’ relationship with God the Father to the test as following, “...The Devil led Jesus to Jerusalem, set Him on the parapet of the Temple, & said to Him, ‘If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from there; for Scripture has it, ‘God will bid His angels to watch over you;’ & again, ‘with their hands they will support you, that you may never stumble on a stone.’ But, Jesus said to it in reply, ‘It also says, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’” Evidently the Devil tried to throw the last temptation on Jesus by making Him doubt about God the Father’s help & support for Him in time of desperate need. It told Jesus to cause an emergency by jumping off the Temple to see if God would send Him any help. Jesus always knew that God the Father would not abandon Him in desperate time. Hence, He pushed back the Devil & told it not to test God. He also reminded us not to let the Devil do the same for us in time of need & test God’s love for us. For God never stops loving us, even when we misbehave or forget about God.

My dear brothers & sisters, what are the demons that might disrupt our spiritual life or keep us from having a close relationship with God? If the Devil tempts us like it did to Jesus, would we be able to resist it? Or, would we easily give in to its temptations like the rest of the world & sell our souls to the Devil? Lent is the time for us to review our relationship with Jesus & clean up our spiritual life. Unless we have a good relationship with Jesus & a strong spiritual life, we would not be able to complete our journey of the Cross this Lent. By walking that journey, we would know Jesus much better & appreciate His death on the Cross for us much more this Lenten season.