

## HOMILY for 1<sup>st</sup> SUNDAY of LENT – Year A

This Sunday's Gospel & 1<sup>st</sup> Reading talk about temptations by the Devil. Reflecting on that, I'm reminded of this fav cute story of mine 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 & sparks & smoke. He ran up & down the aisle screaming, & all of the congregation ran out except for an old man sitting in the back row of the church. 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 years now!"

That's not very nice, is it? Anyway, this Sunday the Church invites us to celebrate the first Sunday of Lent. As you might have known, Lent is about the journey of the Cross & the season of spiritual renewal. To help us overcome the daily challenges & complete that journey, this Sunday's Gospel invites us to enter the desert with Jesus & face the Devil & its temptations head on. The reason why everyone who embarks on the journey of the Cross has to enter the desert & face the Devil is because there should not be any room in one's heart for the Devil to exploit & discourage from completing that journey. The desert is typically the purgatory on earth to help purify the hearts & souls of everyone who takes on the journey of the Cross & prepare them for that long rough road. That way they will not get lost on that journey, or abandon the whole thing half way through it.

Besides God, the Devil could read our minds & knew our strength & weaknesses or what button to push us. The 3 tests that the Devil would typically subject Jesus & all of us to in the desert are food, trust, & wealth. Here is its first test. It knew that Jesus fasted for forty days & nights to prepare Himself spiritually for the journey of the Cross. That means He would be hungry at the end of His fasting period. So, the Devil tempted Jesus to use His divine power to satisfy His bodily hunger by turning stones into loaves of bread. But, Jesus did not want to misuse His divine power to satisfy His physical needs & then put Him under the influence of the Devil. Here is His response to the Devil, "Not on bread alone is human to live, but on every utterance that comes from the mouth of God." Just think about that for a moment & see how that advice of Jesus could help us deal with the temptations of our materialistic world. For we live in a world that often puts material things above everything else, including our spiritual well-being. In fact, our capitalist society would often throw God & the spiritual world out of the window to think only about its bodily needs. Ironically, our current world seems to have everything, but its life is often empty & meaningless. It is like a beautiful box/shell without anything worthwhile inside. No wonder why it is facing a mental health & suicidal crisis.

Here is its second test. The Devil took Jesus to the holy city of Jerusalem & put Him at the highest point of the Temple. Then, it told the Lord to fall off from it to see if God the Father would send His angels to catch Him. Here is His response to the Devil, "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test." Without a doubt, this scenario was designed to test Jesus' faith in God the Father. Our secular world has put out the same test for us believers every day as it tells us to call on God to do the impossible for us. It makes us wonder if God still loves us when challenges come up in our lives. In fact, it often taunts us if we would get anything good out of our Christian faith or our endless hours at Mass & prayer time. However, we the faithful know

that our Lord does not love us any less when something bad happens to us. For we do find meaning & hope with our simple faith life.

Here is the final test. The Devil then took Jesus to a lofty mountain peak & showed Him all the kingdoms of the world & their glory. Then, it told Him to bow down & worship it if He wanted to possess all of that. Here is His response to the Devil, "You shall do homage to the Lord your God; Him alone shall you adore." I wish that the rich & the powerful would heed that message of Jesus & worship only the one true God. Sadly, over the years many people have sold their souls to the Devil to get more wealth or be more powerful. They turn their back on God & embrace wealth & power instead. No wonder why we have seen so much selfishness, greed, hate, & violence in our world.

As we talk about the 3 temptations that Jesus had to face in the desert before His journey of the Cross, I would like to take this opportunity to remind us that the Devil is real. It is not a fantasy or something we have made up in religion. In fact, it has been at the beginning of Creation as the first human couple – Adam & Eve were tempted to disobey God's Command & do the opposite. Surely, they disappointed God & had to face severe punishment for their violation.

Since then, the Devil has not stopped its temptations or got tired of its evil work. On the contrary, it has increased its temptations to include deadly sins such as lust, anger, greed, selfishness, violence, killing, & so on. Its evil work has been escalated every day & become more apparent in our daily life. It has been able to convince more people to adopt a mean, unchristian attitude & embrace the work of darkness instead. These folks would claim to read the Bible & the story of the Good Samaritan while turning their back on the poor, the homeless, hungry children in the Holy Land & Sudan & Congo, the victims of horrible wars around the world, & the immigrants. That is why we have seen so many Christians who would harbor hate & resentment against their neighbors while others do not hesitate to kill & carry out acts of violence against another human being. How could these Christians make it through the journey of the Cross with such a dark & evil attitude? Which Scripture passage could Jesus use to respond to these Christians as He did to the Devil in today's Gospel?

My dear brothers & sisters, what temptation do you think the Devil might use on you? How about on the country & the Church? Lent is the time to walk the journey of the Cross with Jesus & renew our spiritual life. That way we will have enough strength to resist our daily temptations & complete that journey. Otherwise, we will not be ready for the Holy Week or the Kingdom of Heaven in the end.