

## First Sunday of Lent C/2007

As we enter the period of preparation for national elections, we see candidates campaigning and trying to convince people about their ability to run the country; we see the polls rising and dropping constantly. One of the factors that contribute to higher polls is the seriousness with which candidates present their political programs and the convictions they stand for. The more a candidate is convinced of his beliefs, the greater is his enthusiasm and the better his chance of winning. All this is to say that conviction of beliefs, confession of one's ideas, and profession of faith, play a big role in human life. They define our identity, give an idea of what we stand for, and provide us with a motivation to act for the best.

All the readings of this first Sunday of Lent are about the profession of faith. In the first reading, Israel looks back to its history and makes a confession of thanksgiving before the Lord. The people confess that their ancestors were nomad, but God in his bounty has given them a land and brought them out of Egypt, a house of slavery. Therefore, Moses commands them to adore God and to be grateful to him by offering him the first fruit of their products.

What Moses commands the Israelites is inspiring to us. We all come from different backgrounds and have different familial and personal stories, but when we think seriously, we can say that what we have become today is thanks to God. To recognize such a truth compels us to confess that without God's blessing upon us we would not have been what we are, without God's hand upon us our family would not have been what it is, without God's grace we would not survive difficulties and hardships we endured. To confess such a truth compels us also to offer to God the fruit of our work in expression of our gratitude.

Confession of faith, says St Paul in the second reading, leads to salvation. However, this confession should be preceded by faith in the resurrection of Jesus. In other words, the confession of faith is a proclamation with our mouth and an exterior witness of the truth of salvation we believe in and hold in our hearts as true. *"If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. (...) Whoever believes with the heart is justified, and whoever confesses with the mouth is saved"*.

How do we come to believe and to be saved? – By listening to the word of Jesus proclaimed by the Church and by letting it transform our life. As you listen to this homily, the word is near you. As you hold the bible in your hands or put it at your bedside, or in whatever place in your house, the word is near you. As you talk about Jesus in your family, to friends or to other people, the word is in your mouth. The word is in your heart as you work hard to transform your life and behavior according to what you heard from the teaching of Jesus.

The word of God is a powerful tool of our salvation. It defines our identity; it provides us with convictions of faith and gives us strength to triumph over our enemy, the devil. It is with the word of God that Jesus has triumphed in his temptation and affirmed his allegiance to the Father.

The temptations of Jesus are a summary of all the temptations someone can have in his life, namely the temptations of the search for abundance, power, and preservation. They bring to our awareness the fact that Jesus has been tempted all his life long in his humanity, but in all that he remained faithful to his Father. Such a victory he achieves in his faithfulness to the word of his Father.

From the outset, let us say that the background of Jesus' temptation is the life of Israel in the desert. Like the people of Israel who lived 40 years in the desert, Jesus stayed 40 days in the desert, without eating and drinking, before being tested. While Israel, pushed by hunger and thirst, rebelled against God, Jesus remained faithful to his commitments.

The questions the temptations raise are these: Is it possible to have nothing, to be hungry and needy, and to remain faithful to God? Jesus answers yes; because "one does not live on bread alone". Whenever we forget the power of the word of God and think that to be in abundance is all we need, we succumb to the temptation of transforming stone into bread. Remember these words of Jesus: "Do not set your hearts on things to eat and to drink...set your hearts first on the kingdom of God and these he will give you as well" (Luke 12, 29).

Second. Is it possible to be powerless and still be faithful to God? Jesus answers yes, because "You shall worship the Lord, Your God, and him alone shall you serve". When we give up to easy competition, to fight for supremacy or to vainglory, we succumb to the temptation of glory and possession. Remember these words of Jesus: "Anyone who wants to be great among you must be your servant" (Mt. 20, 24).

Third. Is it possible to be frightened in our physical and material security and remain loyal to God? Jesus answers yes; because the Father who loves us too much can protect us from any harm, in his love and mercy. Remember these words of St Paul: "No, in all these things we have complete victory through him who loved us!" (Romans 8, 37).

As we enter Lent, we are reminded that our lives are crossed by many temptations from inside and outside. We can triumph over them only if we are faithful to the word of God and invoke Jesus Christ. The temptations from our culture and society are such that we need a deep wisdom and guidance in order to overcome them. Let us turn to Jesus in prayer, fasting and conversion of heart so that he sustains us. The time of Lent is an opportunity that God gives to approach him in transforming our lives and paying our allegiance to Jesus. In Lent we need to come closer to Jesus, to examine our lifestyle, and to hear his words with freshness of heart. The word of God is eternal, capable of helping us to attain this goal. Let us set a goal in this first week of Lent that can draw us closer to God. **Deut. 26, 4-10; Romans 10, 8-13; Luke 4, 1-13**



Homily Date: February 25, 2007

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Document Name: 20070225homily.pdf