

## 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent A/2011

The readings of this first Sunday of Lent talk about a reality we all face on a daily basis and in many ways, namely temptation and sin. The first reading of the book of Genesis referring to the narrative of creation describes how God created the first human beings from the clay of the ground and how he put in them his breath of life.

In order to sustain them in life, God put them in the Garden of Eden and surrounded them with various trees, including the tree of life and that of knowledge of good and evil. In spite of God's command not to eat of the tree of life in the middle of the garden, Adam and Eve, intrigued by the serpent, came to disobey God and ate the forbidden fruit.

Although this text is not a historic report on the life of the first habitants of the earth or a description of the place where they lived, it contains nevertheless a religious truth we have to know. That truth is that at the beginning of creation, the first parents were happy and lived unashamed toward one another. However, things changed for the worse when they disobeyed God and listened to other creatures than God himself. All that is expressed in a symbolic language under the image of a tree whose fruits they should not eat, and the serpent as the instigator who brings the disorder.

What is behind this text, indeed, is the idea that when we forget our place in the realm of creation as God's creatures and want simply to be like him, we run the risk of destroying ourselves. In that sense, any independence from God has an unfortunate result of alienating us and thereby of separating us from God.

In spite of all this, however, God does not abandon us. He looks always for opportunities to win us back to him. The best of the opportunities he has given us is the sending of his son Jesus to be our savior. That is why St Paul makes a contrasting parallel between Adam and Jesus. While Adam disobeyed God and ate of the forbidden fruit with the result of death entering the world, Jesus, by his obedience has obtained for us immortality and eternal life.

What St Paul develops here is the idea of solidarity, on the one hand between Adam and mankind, and, on the other hand between Jesus and humanity. For St Paul, indeed, Adam was not an individual *per se*. Like a necklace that belongs to a chain, he was a representative of humanity so that by sinning the whole of humanity has been drowned into sin and its consequence, which is death.

By the same logic of complete solidarity with mankind, the obedience and faithfulness of Jesus have won us God's favor so that through him we have forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Because through the disobedience of one many have become sinners, through the obedience of one many will be made righteous.

All that helps us understand the particular role Jesus plays in human history as the savior of the world and the importance of his mission. In order to fulfill that mission, Jesus had to go through trial and suffering. The good news, however, is that unlike Adam who disobeyed in his trial, Jesus remained always faithful to his Father.

That is what today's Gospel tried to show us through the narrative of Jesus temptation in the desert. First of all, we have to remember that those three temptations are the summary of tests and trials Jesus went through in his life. Second, the temptations are the symbol of the trials of life we face on a daily basis as Christians.

The first temptation is the call to turn stones into bread. As such, this temptation has to do with food in all its forms and the desire to have our needs satisfied at any cost. For Jesus, indeed, it is an illusion to think that we can find the satisfaction of our material needs outside God. After all, human food satisfies only the body, but the word of God does more by nourishing the soul.

The second temptation is the call to jump from the top of the temple. As such, this temptation has to do with wonder and sensational act. For Jesus, indeed, the way of sensation is a dead end. A gospel founded on sensation-mongering is just destined to failure. After all, God does not expect us to take risk in order to enhance our prestige, but to do his will.

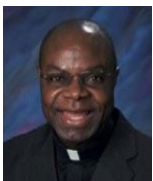
The last temptation is a call to honor and power. As such, this temptation has to do with compromise with the spirit of the world. For Jesus, indeed, we cannot defeat the evil by compromising with evil. We cannot change the world by becoming like the world, but being different. After all, what God wants is that we adore him alone and not human powers, because these cannot save us.

All these temptations are ever present before us and in our lives. They have taken today many forms, some of which are more difficult to detect. Even in the case in which we would recognize them, it is not always easy to overcome them. In such a condition, we run the risk of being discouraged and stop fighting.

We should, however, remember that we are not fighting alone, but with Jesus. That is why, Lent is a time to take up again and anew our fight. Lent is a time of surge against evil through prayer, fasting and almsgiving. In this fight, Jesus is given to us as an example. He has partaken in our human condition so that, as he has triumphed, we may also triumph.

Jesus found the strength to triumph in the word of his Father. He invites us in this Lenten season to listen to the word of God, to make it the guideline of our lives. We cannot overcome our trials and temptations when we neglect the word of God. It is a true weapon for us that can save us. Let us, then, ask Jesus to make us strong, faithful and patient in time of our trials. May God bless you all!

**Genesis 2, 7-9; 3, 1-7; Romans 5, 12-19; Matthew 4, 1-11**



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