

1st Sunday of Lent C/2013

The readings of this first Sunday of Lent talk about the importance of the convictions of and profession of faith. They invite us to confess our faith in God and to entrust ourselves to him in changing our life.

In the first reading, Moses invites the people of Israel to look back in their history and recognize the blessings they have received from God. Because of those blessings, they have to offer him a sacrifice of thanksgiving. They should not forget also that they were nomads, aliens and slaves in Egypt, but God set them free and gave them a wonderful land. Therefore, they have to adore him and thank him by bringing him the products of their soil.

What is behind this text is the idea that, without God's blessing upon us, our life and our family would not have been what it is today. Positively, it means that it is God who sustains us in life and has allowed us to survive hardships and difficulties of life. Therefore, we have to be grateful to him and confess him as our savior.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus fights the temptations from the devil and triumphs over him, thanks to his obedience to God. First of all, the Gospel says that once Jesus came back from the Jordan River where he was baptized, he was led by the Spirit into the desert for forty days where he was tempted by the devil.

By the end of those days, as he had not eaten anything, he was hungry. Then, three times the devil tempted him with strong suggestions. The first time, the devil proposed him to transform stones into bread. But, Jesus opposed him by referring to the text of Deuteronomy 8: 3 that says that "one does not live on bread alone". The second time, the devil showed him all the kingdoms of the world with its power and glory. He suggested giving them to him if he comes to worship him. But, Jesus resisted him by quoting Deuteronomy 6: 10, 13, 20 that says that "God alone and he alone is the one we have to worship".

The third time, the devil invoking the Psalm 91: 11-11 that says that "God has given a command to his angels about you so that they guard you in all your ways lest you dash your foot against the stone", he brought Jesus on the top of the temple of Jerusalem and ordained him to throw himself down if he really was the Son of God. Once more, Jesus resisted him by quoting Deuteronomy 6:16 that says that "You shall not put God to test". In the end, the devil left him with the idea of coming another time.

What do we learn from this Gospel? The first thing I want to highlight is the importance of choosing duty instead of self-satisfaction. In fact, when we look at the way Jesus has reacted to the challenges presented to him by the devil, it seems clear that he made a choice of obeying the father by fulfilling the duty given to him rather than to listen to his body.

For instance, the experience of hunger is very humiliating. You cannot imagine what a hungry stomach is capable of doing in order to find satisfaction. Think a little bit about what some of your ancestors did in the great depression in order to survive. Think of stories told about Europeans in the crisis of the Second World War, how some of them ate dogs, cats or rats, in order to survive.

No one really hungry would like to submit his family or himself to pain when there is a possibility of finding food. My own experience with people in Africa has taught me that some easily accept corruption because they want to satisfy their needs and those of their families. And yet, it is in a circumstance of hunger that Jesus stood firm in his convictions, obeyed his Father and did not give up to the solicitation of the devil.

Let us also examine the reality of honor, glory and power. Who among us would not like to receive praise, honor and glory? How many people get upset just because they have not been recognized in a celebration for which they gave a lot for its organization? What would not people do in order to have power, honor and glory? And yet, it is in such a circumstance that Jesus refused to give in to the solicitations of the devil. He preferred to fulfill his duty than to satisfy his own ambition and desires.

The second thing I want to highlight is about the power of the word of God. In fact, when we pay attention to the way Jesus reacted to the solicitations of the devil, we realize that in order to resist, he used the word of God. That is already an indication that in time of our own temptations, if we cling to the word of God, we can find a powerful instrument of our victory.

This is true in many ways and the spiritual experience has taught us so. The experience has taught us also that when people become negligent in the listening to God through the regular reading of his word in the Bible, they become weak and prey to the solicitations of the devil. Positively, it means that anytime we have temptation, we have to find refuge in the word of God.

That is why we have to remember that the word of God is powerful, performant and effective. It is a powerful tool of our salvation. It defines our identity as Christians and disciples of Jesus. It provides us with convictions in difficult times and gives us strength in order to triumph over our enemy, the devil. As God says in the prophet Isaiah, “the word that goes from my mouth shall not return to me void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it” Isaiah 55:11).

As we enter Lent, let us remember how our lives are crossed by many temptations from inside and outside. In order to triumph over them, we have to be faithful to the word of God. Let us turn to Jesus in prayer, fasting and almsgiving. The time of Lent is an opportunity that God gives us 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. Let us set a goal in this first week of Lent that can draw us closer to God. Let us ask Jesus to convert our hearts and our lives through the listening of his word. God bless you all!

Deuteronomy 26: 4-10; Romans 10: 8-13; Luke 4: 1-13



Homily Date: February 17, 2013
© 2013 – Fr Felicien I. Mbala, PhD, STD
Contact: www.mbala.org
Document Name: 20130217homily.pdf