

First Sunday of Lent A/2014

The readings of this first Sunday of Lent talk about the reality of temptations and sin. They show that we are continually exposed to the solicitations of the devil. They invite us to learn how to resist, like Jesus, by counting on the word of God.

The first reading of the book of Genesis describes the fall of the first parents, Adam and Eve. It starts with the history of their creation by showing how God created them from clay, but gave them of his spirit by making of them living creatures.

It describes also the garden where God put them to live, surrounded by many various trees, including the tree of life and that of knowledge of good and evil.

Then, the text describes what happened to them as they were deceived by the serpent to disobey God and to eat of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. Finally, the text highlights the consequence that follows their disobedience as they realized that they were naked and tried to hide their nakedness with the leaves of the fig.

What is behind this text is the idea that God is the creator of human beings and the guarantee of their happiness. Another idea is that anytime human beings listen to the voice of the devil, instead of God who created them, the consequence will be disastrous for their life and their happiness. The last idea is the truth that our willingness to be independent from God alienates us and separates us from him.

This text allows us to understand the stakes of today's Gospel as it talks about the temptations of Jesus in the desert. In fact, the Gospel starts with the mention of the Holy Spirit as the one who led Jesus in the desert to be tempted. Then, it gives the context through which Jesus was tempted, namely after having fasted for forty days and forty nights.

After that, the Gospel gives the details related to the temptations. On the first temptation, the devil defied Jesus to transform the stones into bread if he was the son of God. Jesus reacted by declaring that one does not live on the bread alone, but on the word of God.

On the second temptation, the devil made him stand on the parapet of the temple of Jerusalem with the injection that he throws himself down because the angels will take care of him lest he hurts himself. Jesus reacted by declaring that one should not put God to test.

On the third temptation, the devil took him to a very high mountain from where he showed him all the kingdoms of the world with the promise of giving them to him if he worships him. At this point, Jesus rebuked him and declared that one should worship and serve God alone. Only after that could the devil leave him while the angels came and ministered to him.

What do we learn from this Gospel? Today, I want to talk about the spiritual warfare and the grace of victory. Let me start this way. We live at an important moment in the history of humanity. Life has never been so beautiful and made easy by the development of so many inventions, discoveries and technologies. What was impossible to attain and to hope for fifty years ago is made possible today by the entrepreneurial spirit of our time.

However, it has also become easy for people to become prisoners and slaves of modern inventions and technologies. For instance, newspapers, radios, televisions, etc display new products and advertising in such a way that it is impossible not to succumb to their attraction.

The consequence is that people are more in debt and in continual dependence than they have been before. Many do not want to stay behind while the world evolves. Many want to match the spirit of our time and to live at the pace of its development. This is a continual temptation before us. But, the irony is that what enslaves us materially speaking as a temptation can also bear on our spirituality.

For instance, when we want to have more and more because of the appeal of the advertisements, it means that we are incapable of resisting solicitations and attractions. By the same token, we lose our ability to right and balanced judgments; we become prisoners of material things. How many people are ruined by online gambling? How many marriages are destroyed by pornography? How many people possess things they do not really need? How many others are obsessed with possessing, eating, drinking or smoking? In the end, attractions and solicitations become an occasion of sin.

It is here that Lent takes all its importance. In fact, Lent is an opportunity God gives us to renew our fight against evil. It is a spiritual surge against evil through prayer, fasting, almsgiving and penance. In this fight, we are not alone; Jesus is with us. He tells us that he was also tempted but he triumphed. Not by relying on his own strength did he win victory, but rather by counting on the word of his Father. We too can triumph in our own temptations with the word of God.

Jesus reminds us that it is an illusion to think that we can find complete satisfaction of our needs outside God. He teaches us that the human food satisfies only the body, but the word of God nourishes the soul. He invites us to adore God alone and not our possessions and material things. That is why living in this world just for what is sensational, prestigious and gratifying of our senses is deadly.

This period of Lent is a time of listening to what the Spirit tells us in the Scriptures. Let us make the word of God the guideline of our life and of everything we do in this life. May we be convinced that we cannot overcome our trials and temptations without the help of the word of God! Let us ask God for the grace to cross the trials of life with Jesus. Let us ask God to protect us from temptations and to deliver us from every evil. Let us 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



Homily Date: March 9, 2014

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Document Name: 20140309homily.pdf