

First Sunday of Lent C/2016

The readings of this first Sunday of Lent talk about the importance of the convictions and profession of faith. They invite us to entrust our lives to God and his word in order to triumph over the temptations.

The first reading recalls the speech of Moses to the people of Israel in which he invites them to be grateful to God by bringing him their offerings. It gives also the reasons why they should do so by referring to their time of slavery in Egypt and to the benevolence of God who set them free. Finally, it gives the modality through which those offerings have to be set before God.

What is behind this text is the idea that, without God's blessing upon us, our life would not be what it is today. Another idea is the truth that it is God who sustains us in life and allows us to survive hardships and difficulties of life. The last idea is a reminder of the debt we all owe to God for the blessings he bestows upon us in this life.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus fights the temptations from the devil. First of all, the Gospel states that it was after Jesus' baptism at the Jordan that he was led by the Spirit in the desert where he was tempted by the devil.

Then, the Gospel evokes the circumstances preceding the temptations by referring to Jesus' fast at the end of which he was hungry. After that, it shows that for three times the devil tempted him about food, glory and security. It also shows that three times Jesus triumphed over the devil by using the strength of the word of God.

Finally, the Gospel says that when the devil has exhausted all the means of temptations, he departed from him for a time.

What do we learn from this Gospel? Today I want to talk about the importance of choosing duty instead of self-satisfaction. In fact, when we look at the way Jesus has reacted to the temptations by the devil, it is obvious that he made a clear choice of obeying his Father by fulfilling the duty given to him rather than to listen to his body.

First of all, let me say that the experience of hunger is very humiliating. No one can imagine what a hungry stomach is capable of doing in order to survive than the one who has experienced hunger. Think a little bit about what some did in the great depression in order to survive. Think of the stories told about Europeans who, in the Second World War, 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 such a circumstance of hunger, after forty days without food, that Jesus stood firm in his convictions, obeyed his Father and did not give up to the solicitation of the devil.

The same is true about the pursuit 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 rather than to satisfy his own ambition and desires.

We can say the same thing about our physical and material security. Who among us, being in insecurity, would not like to be protected and to be assured about his integrity? And, yet in the desert where he was in a precarious condition, Jesus refused to give in by accepting to throw himself down so that the angels may take care of him.

But, here is a question: how did it happen that Jesus would triumph over such temptations? Where did he find resources to resist the devil in such a critical environment? Well, Jesus found resources in the power of the word of God. In fact, when we look closely at the way Jesus resisted the temptations, we realize that it was with the help of the word of God. That is an indication to us 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 spiritual experience has taught us so. The experience has taught us also that when people become negligent in 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 the Lenten season, let us remember how our lives are crossed by many temptations from inside and outside. There are temptations from our culture and our society as well as from within. In order to triumph over them, we really need God’s wisdom and spiritual guidance which we cannot obtain outside the word of God.

Jesus gives us an example of faithfulness and firmness we have all to follow. Let us turn to him in prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Let us use this opportunity of Lent to approach God 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 anew, 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 14, 2016
© 2016 – Fr Felicien I. Mbala, PhD, STD
Contact: www.mbala.org
Document Name: 20160214homily.pdf