

First Sunday of Lent A2023

I want to start the homily of this first Sunday of Lent with an observation. My friends, it happens very often that when we open our mail box, we find it full of advertising papers that propose us various things to buy. By listening to the radio and by watching the television, the commercials follow us even in our living rooms.

These commercials are so powerful that most of the time people succumb to its charms. So, we find people who are heavily indebted as a consequence of buying anything that come out of advertisements. Moreover, 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 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. 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 bears also on our spirituality.

When we want to have more and more because of the appeal of the commercials, it means that we become incapable of resisting solicitations and attractions. By the same token, we lose our ability to a balanced judgment; we become prisoners of material things. How many people are ruined by online gambling? How many marriages are on the brink of collapse because of 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.

The reading of this first Sunday of Lent tell us that at the beginning of creation the first parents, Adam and Eve, lived in happiness, without shame toward one another. A real harmony reigned between them and nature, and all other God's creatures. Things turned bad when, instead of listening to God's order and being faithful, they did things their own way, by listening to the serpent rather than to God.

Their story is not a simple report on what happened in the past, but a mirror of the human condition. It describes what happens anytime we break from God and want to do things our own way. When we forget our state as creatures and want to be like God, when want to know both good and evil, we build our own destruction.

When we do not respect God's plan and law, but instead set up our own moral law based on human passion and emotion, we eventually end up in confusion, taking bad as good and good as bad. When we refuse to depend on God and want to live free without him, we degrade ourselves. The result, in the end, is that we are ashamed of ourselves, because without God we can be but naked. It is God who clothes us, covers us and makes us beautiful as we are.

Instead of this madness, God did not lock us in our sins. He saved us in his son Jesus Christ. That is what St Paul recalls in the second reading. Paul draws a parallel between Jesus and Adam, but in an opposite way. Adam was not an individual per se, but the prototype of the whole humanity. His DNA was passed on to the whole humanity. His sin was the sin of all humanity, his condemnation the condemnation of the whole of humanity.

In the same way, the solidarity of Jesus with humanity makes that through his obedience and faithfulness we are acquitted from death and drawn into life everlasting. “For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so, through the obedience of the one, the many will be made righteous”, St Paul says.

All that helps us understand the role Jesus plays in human history as the savior of the world, as well as the importance of his mission. That mission, however, was not free from trial. Jesus was tempted, but, in all that he remained faithful and obedient to the Father.

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. He renews in us the conviction that living in this world just for what is sensational, prestigious and gratifying of our senses is deadly.

The unsatisfied appetite for food in all its forms, the desire to have our needs satisfied at any cost, the desire to have always more and more, the mirage of finding our material security outside God, the continual search for honor and the blindness that comes from power...; all that is continually before us. All these idols today have taken other forms and other colors, some of which are more subtle than we think. It belongs to each one of us to detect them, and to fight them with the strength of the word of God.

Like Jesus, we can have a victory; he precedes us in the fight. With him, we can triumph. Jesus found the strength to triumph in the word of his Father. Jesus invites us in this period of Lent 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.

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.

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; Romans 5: 12-19; Matthew 4: 1-11



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