

## First Sunday of Lent B2024

The first Sunday of Lent reminds us that life is like a battle field full of mines, intimidations and threats from the enemy. Mines, threats and intimidations are what we call temptations. There are many, from within and from outside; they are almost inevitable.

Although the temptations are unpleasant, they can also be an opportunity from which we can prove to ourselves how strong we are. Temptations prepare us to be better warriors of God. It is like a soldier who has to suffer through difficult training and harsh discipline in order to be good in his duty. When training and discipline are well assimilated, they make him well equipped and ready for the time of combat. Whatever might be the rage or the strength of the enemy, he is sure that, being well prepared, he can overpower the enemy.

In this fight we are not alone. God is always with us so that we might not be crushed by the enemy. Jesus is with us; he fights with us; he supports us and wants us to live. With the help of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, we can overcome all the power of evil. Thus, whatever might be the fire the enemy sends against us, we have the assurance that we will triumph.

We might have been wounded in the fight of life, but even though God wants us to survive and to live. We might have failed in our battle and in our commitments on this journey of life, but God gives us always a second chance so that we start again. Yes, we can rise up from the ashes and the dust of our misery and failures. Mistakes and failures are part of the human journey, but the journey is not over; it is still before us. Lent is a time of a second chance, according the promise made to Noah to not destroy God's creatures anymore because of sin. Lent is an opportunity God gives us to take up again our fight against the enemy.

Our success on this journey of life depends on how we react to our Lord's message. Our Lord knows the difficulties of human life and the temptations we are confronted with. He was tempted in the desert; but he triumphed from the evil one. If we listen to him and follow him, we can also triumph over our temptations.

Our Lord's call in today's Gospel is very clear: "This is the time of fulfillment. The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the Gospel". The word "repent" implies two attitudes: regret and change. For instance, we repent behaviors by which we have hurt someone, whether we did so intentionally or not. However, we cannot limit ourselves to a simple regret of wrong done. We have also to take action that leads us to change. The change here takes the form of a firm resolve to avoid such behaviors for the future. Regret alone is not repentance. Regret without resolve changes nothing; resolve without regret lacks motivation.

Then, we understand that repentance means above all a radical change of our ways of living, thinking and being. It has to do with abandoning the sins and living by God's commandments. Most of the time, people confuse the sorrow for the consequences of sins and the sorrow for sins. Many people are sorry for the consequence their sin would bring on them rather than for the sin itself. If, for instance, they were sure they could escape the consequence, I guess people would certainly do the same sin again and again.

But what our Lord wants is a real hatred of sin and a sincere love of God's commands. In the same way, when our Lord invites us to believe in the Good News he brings, he wants us to trust his word and to believe that God is really such as he tells us. He wants also that we trust him when tells us that the love of his Father for us is so great that he is able to forgive us and give us a new chance of life.

Repentance is a necessary condition for receiving salvation, because if we do not align our hearts and our life with God's law and demands, we cannot have any relationship with him. The repentance of sins is so important that at the beginning of each Mass, we are exhorted to ask forgiveness of God for our sins so that we might be worthy of celebrating the sacred mysteries. When the moment of Holy Communion approaches, we do the same thing by asking again forgiveness of God for our sins so that the Lord may enter into the roof of our hearts.

Why is the Church insisting so much on repentance on Lent? The reason is very simple: We are surrounded by many positive and negative things in this world. The good and positive things bring us a lot of happiness and satisfaction as we enjoy them and use them for our benefit. But, there are also the bad and negative things that exercise such an attraction on us that we are often tempted to abandon the ways of God and his righteousness.

We know by experience that the good we want to do is not always what we do in our life. Sometimes we are surprised to realize that even where we want to do good to others, we are guided by selfish interests. We also know by experience that it is easy to recite God's commandments, but it is more difficult to observe them and to put them into practice.

Given such a reality, the first Sunday of Lent reminds us that we are in a fight against evil. It is not because there are positive and good things going on around us and in the world that the evil has stopped existing. The proof we have about it is the life of Jesus himself who fought in the desert with Satan as he was tempted and pushed to abandon the ways of God, and to obey the enemy.

But, Satan did not triumph over him. On the contrary, our Lord had victory over him by his obedience to the Father and by using the power of the word of God, by fasting and praying to the Father. Here we have good news that, like our Lord, we too can win when we have him at our side.

Let us renew our covenant with God as Noah did at that time of destruction of the creatures of the earth. Lent is a time for all of us to renew our fidelity to the Lord, to regain our place in the ark of his Church and live under his rainbow. Lent opens the door for us to enter the ark once again. Staying out of the ark is to expose ourselves to countless dangers which can destroy us. Our security and our survival depend on how we are capable of re-entering the ark.

**Genesis 9: 8-15; 1 Peter 3: 18-22; Mark 1: 12-15**



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