

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost +

We begin the season of Lent, on this first Sunday, considering the temptation of Jesus. How that event is tied to the journey to Jerusalem and the final victory over death is what I would like us to focus upon today.

At the later Mass I will preach to the children of the parish and I was surprised how much easier it was to write the children's version of this sermon. It was easier because of the message of the Gospel, but because of the extraneous information that we adults have added to our knowledge over the years.

Information that seems to explain for us details of our faith and yet frankly obscure the truth -

The first issues we need to consider is Was Jesus really tempted in the desert? How can God be tempted? How can he who knows all things and knows what will be in the future actually be tested as we are?

This question comes from the adult nature of our faith. We know Jesus is the second person of the Blessed Trinity. We know that Jesus is God and Lord of Life. We hold the Lord Jesus up as our Master, our teacher and the source of our Salvation. But we can easily forget that He is a man like all men. He is the perfect union of the divine and human natures in one.

If we do not embrace and understand this teaching then we can never celebrate with Joy the Resurrection. For if Jesus were something other than both perfectly human and divine, then His death on the Cross was something other than a human death. His suffering and passion was something different than human suffering and His Sacrifice was not what we understand it to be. - The one perfect and complete Sacrifice and oblation for the sin of the world

But he is perfectly human and perfectly divine; sharing our human nature in all things except sin. He could be and was tempted. And as our example extraordinary, He leads us into the truth and teaches us the only way to avoid the traps of sin and death.

Second, we need to consider the nature of the tempter. Recently we completed our Bible Study of the Revelation to St. John. One subject that is complex to explain is the nature of evil. Our language and our thoughts on the subject can obstruct a clear understanding. In the Gospel today we read the Greek word *Diabolon* and we translate that into satan. But the word does not refer a mythical person who is king of the underworld, as we adults have learned, but in fact is

translated as the deceiver, the slanderer, the deceiver the devourer, - as a verb to be eaten through.

Why is that important? - Because the temptation for Jesus and the temptation for us comes not from an outside mythical creature, but from within the heart of every human being. We are told in the Gospel that Jesus was forty days in the desert and he was hungry. The temptation to turn stones into bread is the first temptation. His own hunger created the temptation to feed himself. To understand the temptation we should contrast this with the feeding of the five thousand.

Why was it good for him to feed the multitude with the miraculous multiplying of the loaves and fishes and not good for him to turn a stone into bread? The lesson we learn is that using our gifts and skills and talents for the greater Glory of God and for the benefit of all is good. Using what we have been given so that only we benefit is neither Holy nor good and it can be sin.

Jesus is taken up to the top of the temple and He is tempted to throw Himself down to see the angels of God coming to care for Him and protect Him. Isn't this the same Jesus who walked on water? Isn't this the same Jesus miraculously walks through the angry crowd who wants to stone him? What is different about this event and what can we learn from it?

The temptation for Jesus comes at this early moment of His earthly ministry. He has heard the Word of God claim Him as Son. His human nature and His divine have grown together as He matured. He understands that He is to begin His ministry and He knows what that means. (The Cross awaits Him) and he wants to be sure.

That is the temptation that arises within Him. To be sure, the same doubt that Thomas expressed. The same desire for assurance that each of us who walk by faith and not by sight experiences and feels every day of our life. This week in the daily lectionary we read from the Letter of Paul to the Corinthians these words about our human nature, "For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to gentiles" (I Corinthians 1:22)

There is in the heart and mind of every human being Greek or Jew the desire to be sure - to face the unknown future with surety, but it is not to be in this world. We are to face the future trusting in God, not testing Him, but walking by faith alone.

The last challenge is yet to be faced the final part of the primordial sin of pride that needs to be addressed. For make mistake it is that sin of pride that drove man from the Garden of Eden in all its forms and guises that Jesus faced in the desert. He who reconciled us again to the Father begins His ministry by facing and defeating first the sin that drove us from the paradise of the Garden of Eden, our rightful home.

Jesus is taken up to a high mountain and tempted to become an earthly king and ruler of all that he surveys. Focus only on the here and now, look what may be yours. Who hasn't been tempted to cut corners, take the easy way out or even engage in an activity that we know is wrong, but will lead to our being recognized and celebrated as a success?

This is the temptation of the high place. Jesus will reign for all time sitting on the right hand of God the Father in heaven, but he is tempted to take the easy path, to become an earthly king, with an earthly kingdom.

Again and again Jesus taught and preached about seeking first the Kingdom of God, of those who gave up for the kingdom and would receive their reward. With His words and with His life, Jesus came to lead us from the futility of seeking earthly wealth and power to become a people who would use and celebrate the gifts of God's Creation, but recognize fully the fact that Created Order is falling away and one day will be re-created.

On this first Sunday of Lent we have remembered the Temptation of Jesus. We have recalled that his temptations were the same faced by the first man.

Adam failed and lost his place in the Garden of Eden, Christ the New Adam has come to become our victor - to lead us from the futility of sin unto the Glory of His Father's Kingdom.

He does so facing real temptations, suffering real passion and a real human death.

His sacrifice begins as His takes up His ministry and we are to follow Him carrying our Cross, from Calvary to Glory - Amen