

1st Sunday of Lent - A
Genesis 2:7-9; 3:1-7;
Romans 5:12-19;
Matthew 4:1-11
Little Flower - 3/9/14

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the First Sunday of Lent. Today's first reading tells the story of the Original Sin. The devil, in the form of a serpent, tempted Eve, and Eve tempted Adam, and they both sinned.

One of the major consequences of original sin is what might be called disordered desire. St. Paul captured its meaning in his Letter to the Romans: "*For I do not do the good I want, but I do the evil I do not want*" [7:19]. In other words, we often find it easier to do wrong than to do right; we find it easier to be selfish than to be loving. Consequently, we are very vulnerable to temptation. Although people often want to blame the devil for our temptations, most of our temptations come to us either from within ourselves, from our own disordered desires, or from others or the culture and society of which we are part.

In today's reading from his Letter to the Romans, Paul introduces the concept the Church proclaims during the *Exultet* at the Easter Vigil: *O Felix Culpa* or *O Happy Fault*. "O happy fault that earned so great, so glorious a Redeemer!" In negative terms, if Adam and Eve had not sinned, Jesus would not have come, and we would be the worse off for it. However, because they sinned, Jesus came, and the gift of Jesus is greater than the sin.

Every year the Gospel on the First Sunday of Lent tells the story of Jesus' temptations in the desert. As the Letter to the Hebrews suggests, because Jesus was like us in all things but sin, we have a high priest who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses because he has "*similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin*" [4:15].

Our Lenten Penance Service will be this Monday evening at 7 p.m. here at Little Flower. We will be joined by parishioners of Our Lady of Lourdes and St. Bernadette, our RCIA candidates, and our students preparing for First Eucharist. Eight priests will be available for confessions. Although this is very early in Lent, I think this is a very good way to start Lent.

Sometimes we think of confession as simply wiping the slate clean. However, it means much more than that. First of all, the Sacrament of Reconciliation offers us the opportunity to experience the compassion and the forgiveness of Christ in a very human way through the priest.

Also, if we think of the Gospel story of the woman caught in adultery, Jesus forgave her, but when he said, "Go, and sin no more," he was not ordering her not to sin as much as empowering her to be better in the future. In other words, celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation early in Lent will empower us to be better, to do better, during Lent and into the future. Lent will truly be a new beginning for us. We can then use Lent to build upon the grace of the sacrament by deepening our resolve and our commitment to be and do better.

Sometimes we think of sins as wrongs done and forgiveness as wrongs forgiven. However, sin and forgiveness are more about relationships than actions. When we sin, we wound or destroy our relationship with God just as we sometimes wound or destroy our relationships with others. Forgiveness then is not about wiping the slate clean. It is about healing, healing our relationship with God and our relationship with the community. There are no private sins. Every sin we commit, to the extent that it makes us less good, more selfish, wounds our relationship with the Church and every member of the Church.

My brothers and sisters, Jesus did not give us the Sacrament of Reconciliation to be a burden but a gift. Although it is always difficult to acknowledge sin and ask forgiveness, as Pope Francis recently said, "celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation means being enfolded in a warm embrace: it is the embrace of the Father's infinite mercy.... each time we go to confession, God embraces us. God rejoices!"¹

¹Pope Francis, General Audience, 19 February 2014, para. 3, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/audiences/2014/documents/papa-francesco_20140219_udienza-generale_en.html.