

First Sunday of Lent - B
Genesis 9:8-15;
I Peter 3:18-22;
Mark 1:12-15
Little Flower - 2/11/18

My Brothers and Sisters,

The Gospel on the First Sunday of Lent every year tells the story of Jesus being tempted by the devil during his forty days in the desert. Both Matthew and Luke list three specific temptations Jesus faced. Mark's Gospel simply states that Jesus was tempted by the devil. Today's Gospel, then, invites us to ask ourselves what is our greatest temptation today. I would suggest that the greatest temptation we face today is to live as if there is no God.

To live as if there is no God is to deny our dependence on God for all we are and have and our interdependence on one another. The deadly sin of pride is living as though we are self-made men or women. More importantly, to live as if there is no God is to live as though we are not accountable to God for our lives. It is to believe that we are answerable for our choices to no one but ourselves. I would suggest this is the cause of a lot of moral chaos in our society and world, such as Wednesday's killing of 17 people at the high school in Parkland, Florida.

In fact, we are dependent on God and interdependent on one another. As Paul wrote in his letter to the Colossians, "...in Him [i.e., in Jesus] *all things hold together*" [1:17b]. In other words, if God or Jesus stopped loving us even for an instant, we would not die; we would simply cease to exist. Likewise, as Matthew Kelly points out in *Perfectly Yourself*, we all have a conscience. One of the most beautiful passages from the Second Vatican Council defines conscience as the most secret core and sanctuary of a person where a person is alone with God whose voice echoes in his or her depths [GS 16].

As I mentioned a few weeks ago, the words of Jesus in today's Gospel form the core of what the historical Jesus preached when he lived and walked among us: "*This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.*" Jesus' summary teaching contains two statements and two imperatives.

"*This is the time of fulfillment.*" Jesus is saying that this is the right time or God's time for the fulfillment of God's promises. Therefore, Jesus seeks to convey a sense of urgency to his message to us this Lent.

"*The kingdom of God is at hand.*" Jesus equates his own coming with the coming of God's kingdom. Jesus' coming initiated God's kingdom. However, God's kingdom will not be fully realized until Jesus returns in glory. In theological Italian, there is the beautiful phrase for the time between Christ's two comings, the time in which we are living: *gia ma non ancora*, "the already but not yet."

"*Repent.*" Throughout the Gospels, Jesus calls us to conversion. The Greek word *metanoieite* calls for a radical change of heart, a radical change in the direction of our life, a turning away from selfishness and sin and a turning outward in love to God and others. Also, it presumes a new way of seeing all of reality.

"*And believe in the gospel.*" Jesus calls us from unbelief to belief. In other words, he calls us to believe in him, i.e. to entrust our lives and our futures to him and to his word of promise. The word *gospel* means *good news*. The good news is the promise of our salvation in Jesus Christ.

My brothers and sisters, every year on the First Sunday of Lent, we give you a Lenten reminder. This year's Lenten reminder is a holy card with Mark 1:15 on one side and a beautiful Lenten prayer on the other side. "*The KINGDOM of GOD has come near. REPENT, and BELIEVE in the GOOD NEWS.*"