

First Sunday of Lent - C
Deuteronomy 26:4-10;
Romans 10:8-13;
Luke 4:1-13
Little Flower - 2/14/16

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the First Sunday of Lent. People sometimes ask about the origin of the word *lent*. The word *lent* comes from the Anglo-Saxon word *lencten* or spring, which comes from an older Teutonic word which means to become longer or lengthen. The Anglo-Saxon word for spring developed from the fact that days lengthen at this time of the year, and so our springtime season of penance and prayer came to be called Lent in English. In contrast, the Latin word for Lent is *Quadragesima*, which literally means fortieth.

Every year on the First Sunday of Lent, the Gospel tells the story of Jesus' forty days of fasting and prayer in the desert followed by his temptations by the devil. Therefore, Lent, our season of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, lasts forty days. Forty was a recurring number in the Old Testament. For example, in the story of Noah and the flood, it rained for forty days and forty nights. Because of their sins, the Israelites spent forty years wandering in the desert before entering the promised land.

The Church celebrates the penitential season of Lent with prayer, fasting, and almsgiving to help us prepare to celebrate the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus, to help us repent of our sins, to strengthen us to resist temptation, and to help us grow into the likeness of the Risen Christ.

Just as Jesus endured three temptations in the desert, today I would like to suggest three temptations with which we all struggle. The first is the temptation to complacency and self-sufficiency. We are tempted to believe we are as good as we need to be and to accept certain faults and failings as unchangeable parts of ourselves. Likewise, we are tempted to believe that we can overcome temptation and sin by our own power.

The second temptation, I believe, is the most perverse of all. If we have struggled long and hard to overcome a particular sin, small or large, and we commit the sin again, we are tempted to despair, i.e., to feel hopeless, helpless, and worthless, and, therefore, to believe that we will never be able to overcome the sin. Once we begin to feel this way we will be tempted to give up and to continue committing that sin.

The third temptation is to judge others and to divide the world into us versus them. Just think about all the divisions in our society and world today. In today's second reading, Paul made the point that there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, a radical statement in Paul's time. The Jews had divided the world into Jews and Gentiles, the chosen and the non-chosen. However, Paul pointed out that "*the same Lord is Lord of all, enriching all who all upon him.*"

My brothers and sisters, there will never be a time in our lives when we are free from all temptation. Likewise, we also know from experience that there will be times when we will give into temptation and sin. However, we can take comfort in knowing that although Jesus did not sin, he was tempted as we are. As we read in Hebrews, "*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin*" [4:15]. The Letter to the Hebrews continues: "*So let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help.*" In other words, Jesus himself is God's mercy and compassion.