

1st Sunday of Lent - A
Genesis 2:7-9; 3:1-7;
Romans 5:12-19;
Matthew 4:1-11
Little Flower - 3/1/20

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the First Sunday of Lent. This afternoon our Catechumens and Candidates will celebrate the Rite of Election with the Archbishop. Our Lenten journey is not just our personal faith journey. As a community, we walk with our catechumens, candidates, and *confirmandi* on their journey to Easter and the Easter sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist.

Today's reading from Paul's Letter to the Romans links the first reading and the Gospel, contrasting the sin of Adam and the obedience of Christ. In the first reading, Adam and Eve succumb to the devil's temptations; in the Gospel, Jesus rejects the devil's temptations. The sin of Adam brought death to the world; the obedience of Christ brought life to the world.

The reading from Genesis offers us an insight into temptation and an insight into the real damage caused by sin.

In the first reading, the devil tempts Eve, Eve tempts Adam, and both sin. When they are caught by God, Adam blames Eve, and Eve blames the devil. Although I certainly believe in the devil and the devil's temptations, I am always concerned when people talk about the devil tempting them. We need to recognize that most of our temptations come from our own selfishness and from others. The devil works in and through our humanness.

In the story of creation in Genesis 2, we were told that in the beginning the man and woman were naked but felt no shame. Immediately after their sin, their eyes were opened, and they recognized their nakedness. In the beginning, because there was no sin, there was no vulnerability. Sin caused alienation and, therefore, vulnerability. In the beginning, there could be intimacy without risk. Now we ask who can hurt us the most. Those who know us best and whom we love most. Now we ask whom can we hurt the most. Those whom we know best and who love us most.

In today's Gospel, the devil tempted Jesus three times, and three times Jesus resisted the devil's temptations. Instead of trying to relate each temptation to our individual lives, let us ask ourselves what are the temptations we all face living in twenty-first century America.

After fasting forty days, Jesus was hungry. The devil tempted Jesus to turn stones into bread. For most of us in our country, consumerism is our first temptation. Consumerism is not only about having things; it is about defining ourselves by what we have and how we look.

The devil tempted Jesus to throw himself down from the temple and allow God to rescue him. Our second temptation is to refuse responsibility for our lives and our choices. Everything bad that happens to us or that we do becomes someone else's fault. Of course, if we are not responsible for the problem, we are not responsible for fixing the problem or working to change ourselves.

Finally, the devil promised Jesus all the kingdoms of the world if Jesus would fall down and worship him. Our third temptation is the culture of narcissism. Everything is, or should be, about me. The world and others are only extensions of me.

My brothers and sisters, we are called to proclaim the Gospel, the Good News, of Jesus Christ. We do this through our own conversion and our work to change the world. Conversion is, first of all, to change the way we see God, others, the world, and ourselves. To change the world, we have to resist the temptations embedded in the very fabric of our society. Today's reading from Paul's Letter to the Romans gives us great hope. In contrasting Jesus' death on the cross with Adam's sin, Paul reminds us that through Jesus, God brought forth an even greater good from Adam's sin.