

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent - B  
Genesis 9:8-15;  
I Peter 3:18-22;  
Mark 1:12-15  
Little Flower - 2/21/21

My Brothers and Sisters,

Each year the Gospel of the First Sunday of Lent tells the story of Jesus' temptations in the desert. Like Matthew and Luke, Mark tells us that Jesus was tempted by Satan. Of course, we can say that we, too, are tempted by Satan. However, if we say that, my concern is that it then becomes too easy to shift responsibility to God for freeing us from temptations.

Many of our temptations come from outside ourselves. For example, friends and/or peer pressure can tempt us directly or indirectly to make sinful choices. More often, our society and its values, especially in our pervasive media culture, tempt us to sin. To resist these temptations, we have to become persons of character: we have to have and live moral principles. We cannot identify uncritically with the values of others or the values of society. Many of our temptations, of course, come from within ourselves, i.e., from our own selfishness and self-centeredness.

Unlike Matthew and Luke, Mark does not give us any details about Jesus' temptations. The desert represents the wilderness, and the wilderness represents disconnectedness and aloneness. I think we are most tempted when we feel most alone, most disconnected from God, others, the world, and ourselves. Often stress in relationships or at work are major causes of these feelings. Sometimes our feelings just get all mixed up. Sometimes we choose other priorities over relationships.

The antidote for this is Jesus' program for Lent. Fasting, denying ourselves, makes us more sensitive to God and to others. When we pray, we deepen our connection with God. When we share with others, especially those in need, we deepen our connection with others.

Scripture scholars tell us that the last verse of today's Gospel is the best summary of Jesus' teaching: "*This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.*" In this verse, we are called to conversion. Conversion can mean several different things. Often we use the word to refer to changing religions. Sometimes we use the word *conversion* to refer to a major change in our behavior. However, the Greek word for conversion means a turning around of our lives rooted in a new way of seeing.

In 1979, a man named Christopher Lasch wrote a book entitled *The Culture of Narcissism*. In this book, he suggested that we have become so self-involved that everything is about us. Sometimes we even make faith and religion too much about us. For example, in narcissistic Christianity, faith and religion are primarily about my experience of God and what I get out of Church instead of about my response to God and my obligations to God, the Christian community, and humanity.

Perhaps the new way of seeing to which we are called is to look outward more than inward, at God and others more than ourselves. Several years ago, a representative of Polis made an interesting observation to the priests of the West Deanery. When it comes to church, young people are looking for mystery and social outreach. Both mystery and outreach are about otherness.

My brothers and sisters, today's first reading tells the beautiful story of the rainbow as a reminder of God's covenant with Noah and all living beings that the waters would never again become a flood to destroy all mortal beings. According to St. Peter, the story of Noah prefigured baptism. The waters of the flood destroyed life; the waters of baptism give life. As our Elect complete their journey to baptism, today's Liturgy challenges all of us to walk with them, to support them, and to join with them in entering into the mystery of Jesus' dying and rising, dying to selfishness and sin, and rising to life and love.