

1st Sunday of Lent - C
Deuteronomy 26:4-10;
Romans 10:8-13;
Luke 4:1-13
Little Flower - 3/6/22

My Brothers and Sisters,

Several years ago, I was invited to talk to the Speedway Lions Club about Lent and Ash Wednesday. In preparation for that talk, I learned some things about Lent that I had not known.

The word *lent* comes from the Anglo-Saxon word *lencten*, or *spring*. This in turn comes from an older Teutonic word which means to become longer. Our word *lengthen* comes from the same root. The Anglo-Saxon word for spring developed from the fact that days lengthen at this time of the year, and thus our springtime season of penance and prayer came to be called Lent in English.

During the first three centuries of the Church, the fast before Easter probably did not exceed two or three days. In fact, the first mention of forty days, probably our Lent, occurs in the canons of the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. The custom may have originated in the prescribed fast of candidates for baptism, and the number forty was evidently suggested by the biblical forty-day fasts of Moses, Elijah, and especially Jesus.

The Gospel for the First Sunday of Lent is always Jesus' temptations by the devil after his forty-day fast in the desert. Someone suggested that each temptation tempted Jesus to be more or less than fully human. If that is true, perhaps our greatest temptation, the temptation that creates so much alienation in our lives, is the temptation of unrealistic expectations of God, others, and ourselves.

We expect God to act as we would have him act. We remake God into our own image and likeness. We would have a God who consoles us but never challenges us. We would have a God who does not permit great evils, such as the invasion of Ukraine, or natural disasters. We would have a God who does not permit the innocent to suffer, especially innocent children. We would have a God who justly punishes **others** who need to be punished.

We expect others to meet our expectations of them. We expect everyone to accept and like us. One of the most destructive expectations husbands and wives have of each other is the expectation that the other will completely meet his or her needs. This same expectation is often found in the friendships of younger people. No one person can meet all the needs of another person for closeness, communication, sharing, and support.

We often expect ourselves to be perfect, although Scripture says God alone is perfect. We expect ourselves never to make mistakes. We expect ourselves to be good at everything we try to do. We expect ourselves to be able to make everyone accept and like us.

However, sometimes our expectations of God, others, and ourselves are too low. We sometimes expect God to punish us or, at least, not to forgive us for something we did or did not do. We sometimes expect God not to accept or love us or, at least, to accept or love us less.

We sometimes do not expect enough of others, especially in the area of respect. In relationships, others tend to live up or down to our expectations of them. Many people tolerate emotionally abusive relationships or, at least, disrespect in relationships. Emotional abuse and disrespect should not be tolerated in marriages, dating relationships, or friendships.

We sometimes do not expect enough of ourselves. We do not challenge ourselves or allow others to challenge us to become holier, better, more human, more Christian.

My brothers and sisters, today's first reading reminds us of the Exodus of the Old Testament when God delivered his people from slavery in Egypt. In his letter to the Romans, Paul reminds us of the new Exodus in which Jesus passed from death to life, enabling us to pass from the death of sin to a life of holiness. Today's Gospel challenges us to resist the temptation of unrealistic expectations that lead to increased alienation from God, others, and ourselves.