

1st Sunday of Lent - A
Genesis 2:7-9; 3:1-7;
Romans 5:12-19;
Matthew 4:1-11
Little Flower - 2/26/23

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 Genesis tells the story of the original temptation and the original sin. After God created Adam and Eve, he placed them in the Garden of Eden. He told them they could eat from any of the trees in the garden except from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If they ate from that tree, they would die. The devil assured Eve that they would not die but would become like gods. Eve saw that the tree was good for food, pleasing to the eyes, and desirable for gaining wisdom, so she ate it and gave it to Adam to eat.

This story teaches us an important truth about temptations. Eve did not eat the fruit of the tree to disobey God but because of the good she saw in eating it. We never choose something because of the bad we see in it but because of the good we see in it.

There were multiple consequences to their sin. First, death entered the world. Second, they were alienated from God, each other, the world, and themselves. Third, after they sinned, they recognized that they were naked. Before they sinned, they were naked and felt no shame because there was no sin and, therefore, no vulnerability. Sin introduced vulnerability to our world. Even the most intimate relationships bring risks.

In today's Gospel, Jesus was tempted three times by the devil. This week I have been thinking about what the devil's three temptations would be today.

The first is forgetfulness of God. I would suggest that often we do not factor God into our choices and decisions. When things are going well, we forget to thank God. When things are going poorly or when we are trying to make a difficult decision, we forget to ask God for help. When we are making moral decisions, we forget to think about their potential impact on our salvation.

The second is social media. So many people are tethered to social media. We have all noticed people in restaurants more focused on social media than on their companions. Surveys have shown people spend hours on social media. This is even more true for young people. Many young people prefer remaining closeted in their rooms watching TikTok videos rather than spending time with family or friends. Much of the content on social media is harmful. For example, how many young people have died or been seriously injured or have injured or killed others because of Tik Tok challenges. I once asked the parents of two daughters where their children were learning their values. Their father held up his phone.

The third temptation flows from the second. The third temptation is the temptation to all-or-nothing or black-and-white thinking. All-or-nothing and black-and-white thinking create divisions and build walls. Jesus came to unite people, to build community, to heal, and to reconcile. Social media contributes to disunity and division. When I was a freshman in college, one of my classmates played music in study hall all the time. One of the songs he often played was "Shades of Gray" by the Monkees. To create community and build unity, we first have to listen to others.

My brothers and sisters, in today's reading from his Letter to the Romans, Paul introduces the concept the Church proclaims during the *Exultet* at the Easter Vigil: *O Felix Culpa* or *O Happy Fault*. "O happy fault that earned so great, so glorious a Redeemer!" In negative terms, if Adam and Eve had not sinned, Jesus would not have come, and we would be the worse off for it. However, because they sinned, Jesus came, and the gift of Jesus is greater than the sin.