

## The First Sunday of Lent

*The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to him. [St Mark 1:12-13]*

The First Sunday of Lent always presents the temptation of the Lord. This makes sense because the Lord fasted for 40 days, rebuffed the temptations of the devil and then began His public ministry. We spend forty days fasting, in self denial, forty days doing everything we can to come closer to God so we also can do the work of the Kingdom. Usually on this Sunday we hear about three different temptations the Lord endured: turn stones into bread, demand that his Father work a miracle to save him, and trade His love for all the power of the world. We don't come upon these this year because they are in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Today's reading is from the Gospel of Mark. Mark just states that Jesus went into the desert for 40 days, was confronted with temptations, beat off the devil and then began his mission.

Temptations are always there and are difficult to overcome. As I often say, the day we feel that we are no longer subject to temptation, we really should take our pulse because we will probably be dead.

Temptations are difficult to overcome. It is so easy for us to say to others, "Just say no," but it is difficult when we are the ones who are tempted. The complex aspect of temptations is that they all contain an element of attractiveness, an element of good. All of God's creation contains beauty. We human beings pervert that beauty and turn something that is good into bad. For example, the human body is beautiful; pornography is a perversion of the beauty. Another, example, there are wonderful medications to help people who suffer from anxiety attacks, depression, etc. The same medications is used by addicts to destroy their lives and the lives of those around them. In the 17th chapter of the Book of Revelation, the visionary John is shown the great harlot of Babylon who was drunk with the blood of saints and the martyrs. When the visionary saw her he marvelled. She was amazing to behold. The harlot was pagan Rome with all its splendour and glory. It was marvellous, but it was still evil. By the time of the Lord, Rome was a moral cess pool, the centre of all that was wrong in the worship of the world.

All sin is attractive, if it weren't attractive we wouldn't be tempted by it. When someone says, "If it feels good, do it," what they are saying is that sin is acceptable as long as you are getting selfish pleasure from it. That is the way of the world. That is not the way of Jesus. Nor can it be our way.

Jesus is the conqueror of sin. But the battle was not a simple task. Jesus was tempted to save His own life and to give up and not go along with the Father's plan. But His love for the Father and His love for us were more powerful than anything the devil or the world could muster up.

He beat off temptation, and then told us: "entrust your pain, your temptation and even your sin to me. I have conquered and will continue to conquer evil." When we choose Christ, evil really doesn't stand a chance. In the Battle for the Kingdom, Jesus fights with us, finding a way for us to win, even though we are weak and often sinful.

God refuses to give up on us. Even when evil makes inroads into our lives. "See I have set my bow in the skies as a sign that I will never destroy my people." That was the promise made to seal the covenant with Noah after the flood. The bow is the rainbow. For people of faith, the rainbow is not just a beautiful natural occurrence. It is a sign of our hope in God. When we are overwhelmed with our own human weakness, our own continual sinfulness, the rainbow reminds us: God refuses to give up on us. We can't give up on ourselves. Look at the rainbow. God is the Compassionate, the Merciful One.

The 40 days of Lent are really about loving Jesus. We spend this time looking for ways to grow in our love for our Saviour. We fight off temptation with Him. We give Him our sins in confession. We unite ourselves to Him through the Eucharist and all forms of prayer. We do everything possible to allow His grace into our lives. And we recognize that His grace is enough for us

On this First Sunday of Lent we pray that for the courage to live Christocentric lives, lives which are Christ centred. With Him in the centre of our lives, nothing that the world throws at us will defeat us. He is the conqueror of temptation. He is the Victor over sin.