19 Homily for the First Sunday of the Lenten Season Year A

5 March 2017

Gen 2:7-9, 3:1-7; Rom 5:12-19; Mt 4:1-11

🟔“The greatest temptations are not those that solicit our consent to obvious sin, but those that offer us great evils masking as the greatest good.” [Thomas Merton](http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/1711.Thomas_Merton) in [No Man Is an Island](http://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/169157).

🟔Temptations in the Desert “A Descent into the perils that beset mankind.” Pope Benedict. So Christ is the best one to teach about how to stand up to our own demons.

🟔Temptations Target a fundamental thing we seek in life, namely, happiness. We all like to be happy and we are created to be happy. The devil knows about it and he targets exactly this.

🟔How does he target? The tempter makes us feel the pinch of poverty. He did this to Eve and Adam and he did it even to Christ. When we feel the pinch of poverty, the normal human tendency is to yearn for what you don’t have. In your mind you feel quiet justified and vindicated. You seem to think: “I am hungry, here is a fellow who is willingly helping me and there is nothing wrong in going for it.” So we open our hearts and our being to the tempter, allowing the tempter to take advantage of our hunger and allowing the evil one to turn stones into bread.

🟔 Let us see how Christ reversed this whole tendency of ours and brought us true happiness. This happiness comes to us through three different forms: bodily, psychological and spiritual levels.

🟔Three Levels:

Bodily Level: Eve saw the fruit was good to eat / Bread. Jesus said “I am the true Bread.” We tell ourselves; “We consume that true bread that satisfies all our hungers.”

Psychological Level: The fruit was pleasing to the eyes / Power. Pleasing to the eyes. Jesus said to himself “God’s power is the powerlessness of the Cross.” We tell ourselves: “We embrace that powerlessness of Christ reminding us of St Paul’s words: When I am weak, then I am strong.” (2 Cor 12:10)

Spiritual Level: Ideal for gaining knowledge / False Worship. Jesus said to himself “My value is the value God the Father has granted me. Nobody can take that value from me.” We tell ourselves: “I am created into the image and the likeness of God. So nobody can take that away.”

🟔The devil invites us to serve these three levels in a self-serving / self-promoting way. Let us therefore ask who are these demons within us who tell us to self-serve and to self-promote. Jesus proved that unfailing fidelity to Father’s will is the key to overcoming temptation. This unfailing fidelity is not easy and it hurts. But the bottom line is to please the Father in all things.

🟔So the season of Lent is a wonderful time for us to show our unfailing fidelity to Jesus. The old English word ‘lent’ signifies ‘spring season'. In many ways the season of Lent is a season of spring because it is the time that like the whole of nature around us, blossoms; our spiritual lives too bloom and bear fruit. But it needs pruning and fertilizing. How do you prune? Through fasting, and almsgiving/sacrificing. How do you fertilize? Through acts of charity, prayer, reading scripture and receiving the sacraments especially the sacrament of penance. Do they hurt? Yes they do. But these acts talk about our unfailing fidelity to Christ and our willingness to please him.

Jesus, Word of God,

you walked the desert,

and you thought and prayed about who you are.

The devil slithered around you and hissed, “Choose me! Choose me!

But instead,

you loved the Father, above all things,

and you loved your neighbours even as you loved yourself.

And so we choose you.

Take us also to a desert; speak to our hearts.

Deepen our own grasp of who you really are: the true bread of life.

(A Poem by Anne M. Osdieck)