

First Sunday in Lent – Matthew 4:1-11

Temptation of Jesus

The Temptation of Jesus is connecting the 40-day fast with Moses and Elijah in the desert and with the great temptation or trial of God's patience by the people in the exodus who rebelled against the divine nourishment, **the manna**, and **worshiped the golden calf**; and by identifying Jesus as the Son of God, meaning **Israel**, the people of God, not the Messiah. Not surprising, that is why our own Lent duration is 40 days.

All of Jesus' answers to the tempter are quotations from Deuteronomy. The individual temptations in Matthew are not as bizarre as they appear at first glance; they are all based on various ways of sinning against the great commandment to love God "*with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might*" as the command was understood by the early rabbis: where **heart** refers to the two affective impulses or drives, good and evil; **soul** means life, even martyrdom; **might** means wealth, property, and other external possessions.

This basic theme of love of God unites the whole narrative. It also connects with our Church teaching for Ash Wednesday to Fast, Pray, and Give Alms. As I mentioned at the Ash Wednesday homily, all three requests help us to grow in our relationship of love with God through **prayer**, with neighbors through **Alms Giving**, and with ourselves with **fasting**.

Let us clarify **prayer to God**. There is private prayer and there is public prayer. Private Prayer is mentioned by Jesus in the Ash Wednesday gospel, "Go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret." Obviously we cannot do that in public prayer, even though some try. The Eucharist is a public prayer of the Faith Community where we bring the grace of our time in private prayer to fruition in our corporate worship of God on Sunday. Public prayer renews not only our personal relationship to God but also with one another in our corporate or the parish's relationship with God as a body of Christ.

Alms giving also renews our relationship with one another, especially the stranger, as Jesus again reminds us in the gospel for Ash Wednesday, "When you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing." And lastly, fasting renews the relationship with ourselves. That might sound strange at first, but how well do we know ourselves except when we are tested

and especially in extreme conditions? Only our best friend might tell us, especially if we seriously ask them.

As Marianists, our Rule of Life requires the brother to see a Spiritual Director at least once a month. Spiritual Direction keeps our spiritual life genuine rather than a fantasy or delusional. And when we are seriously fasting, even to the point that even our best friend finds us difficult, then we may begin to know who we really are. For some, it may take a psychologist to help us dig deeper, but that can be expensive.

This is the Sunday for the Rite of Election or Enrollment of Names of our OCIA Candidates where we as a faith community will profess our acceptance of the candidates who have completed their period of preparation.