

First Sunday of Lent: Luke 4:1-14

Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert for **forty days** to be tempted by the devil. Maybe he was influenced by his cousin John the Baptist. We know of others who followed Jesus' example and went into the desert like the Apostle Paul, in Galatians 1:17 for several years. Also, Saint Antony went into the desert to battle the devil and the desert became his home. Fortunately, we are not encouraged to go into any desert but we are encouraged to give up our dessert, depending on where one puts the accent. We can make a desert experience of our Lent.

Ash Wednesday's readings give us an example of how to proceed during this important time of reflection and penance and prayer as we prepare for the Pascal Mystery, Easter. Today's gospel also reiterates our agenda of *Fasting, Praying, and Alms Giving*.

It is because Jesus was **Fasting** for 40 days that the devil begins his first temptation. "Command this stone to become bread." The second temptation is **Prayer**, with the Devil's taunt to worship him. And the third is **Alms Giving**, "Throw yourself down from here since the angels will protect you."

The first temptation is self-explanatory, **fasting**. What a great way to control our desires, our concupiscence, and our weight. How easy it would be to dismiss any need for fasting if one could make bread appear from rocks. But Jesus responds that it is the **Word of God** as our real **bread of life**.

As for the second temptation, I have always found it interesting that the Devil expected Jesus to worship him in exchange for power and glory. Ironically, it will be **Roman power and glory** that will execute Jesus through their own misunderstanding of his real Kingdom. And if the High Priests and their council knew of Jesus' prayer routine, they would realize that Jesus was not interested in their kind of power and glory either. In Luke's gospel we have multiple examples of Jesus **praying** all the time, throughout the night, especially before important decisions, like at the beginning before he chooses his disciples.

The third temptation, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, since God will save you." That would be quite a show, and that is exactly what the Devil wants, a "show" for the crowd so that they will follow him like a rock star. Sounds like our Pop Stars and their extravagant "shows." Yet Jesus did the exact opposite, he humbled himself and mingled among the people. He touched the lepers and cleansed them and touched the dead and

brought them to life. A simple touch that would make any other man ritually unclean. He ate with sinners and prostitutes. In Philippians 2:6, "He humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross."

Giving alms grounds us to the earth rather than exalting ourselves. Saint Francis gave alms to the lepers but then went back and kissed their hand. Bishop Sheen told a story where he went to a leper colony and also gave alms. He felt guilty afterwards, because he dropped the coins into their hands afraid of touching the leper and contracting the disease.

There are several ways of interpreting Jesus' temptations, such as **Prayer** strengthens and deepens our *Obedience* to God, that we may more willingly love others because we have loved God. **Fasting** helps strengthen our *Chastity* by keeping us focused on our commitment to the Lord where this vow begins first in our minds before it is expressed in our bodies. Giving **Alms** strengthens our sense of *Poverty* not so much that we become another mouth to feed, but to share out of our abundance with the poor who are our brothers and sisters in Christ and extends our circle of inclusivity.

"When the devil had finished every temptation, he departed from him for a time."

Brothers and sisters, this is the time when the devil has returned and continues to tempt Christ, again, **through us**. How will we respond to the devil this year? Will we wait until Good Friday? Certainly, those who die with Christ will rise with Christ. But not unless we face each Lent with all those little deaths to our Old Self. Saint Paul reminds us to put off the **Old Man** or **Old Woman** and put on the **New**.

For the First Sunday of Lent, I have this stone as a symbol of the bread that Jesus could have turned into bread, but instead Jesus offer himself at each Mass as the Real Bread of Life.

Please join us each Wednesday for Eucharist and then a simple meal of salad and sandwiches which parishioners have brought in the Brother's Residence. Afterwards we will have a short reflection by a parishioner and then Adoration of the Bread of Life up to 7:30 pm.