

First Sunday of Lent

First Sunday of Lent Cycle A

March 01, 2020

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There is an abundance of spiritual insights in our readings today.

Let's begin with an overall look at Lent. Lent comes from the Anglo-Saxon word, *Lewcten*, which means Spring. It was expressly commanded as a 40 - day period of prayer in the year 360. It was originally intended by the Church to be a spiritual retreat. It is the great paschal retreat of the Church. Lent disposes us the faithful – by prayer, penance, fasting, and good works – to more fully celebrate the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus; it can only be rightly understood in the light of Easter.

Lent is a time for a “fasting of the heart” – more to do with self-giving than self-denial though both are important. Fasting and Feasting: Fasting from judging others, from impatience, from resentments, from idle gossip; Feasting on forgiveness, compassion, kindness, patience, and so forth. The season of Lent is a time of *metanoia*, conversion, a change of mind and heart, to be more like Christ. Lent recalls our baptism, the beginning of God's life in us. Lent reminds us of sin and our own moral weakness, which leads us to a greater dependence on God's love and mercy.

THE READINGS

Genesis – the reading from this Book introduces sin on a world stage, as a tragedy affecting all of humankind. Evil was not God's design but results from human beings – represented by Adam and Eve – turning away from God and pursuing their own will. Professor of Theology, Kimberly Hope Belcher explains:

“What Adam and Eve wanted to have – wisdom – is a good thing, but they wanted it without the relationship with God that makes it good.”

Psalm 51 – the psalmist gives us a prayer that we can pray whenever we realize we have fallen into a temptation:

“Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned!” It is a prayer not only for forgiveness but for a “clean heart” and a “steadfast spirit” so we won't fall into the trap again. Romans – continues the theme of Adam and Eve's revolt. However, St. Paul also sounds a note of hope: because of the death and resurrection of Jesus we have gained much more than we lost. Roland Faley shares:

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“Sin, for all its dire consequences, is a *felix culpa*, a happy fault. It provided God with the opening for redemption in his Son, which in its beneficent effects far surpasses the evil for which it is an antidote.”

Lesson: all the evil in the world cannot overshadow God's goodness and that gives us hope – and courage.

Matthew – The gospel tells us that Jesus in his humanness was tempted as we are.

The location: in the desert, for “40 days and 40 nights” recalling Moses’ fast on Mount Sinai and the prophet Elijah’s journey to Mount Horeb.

The evil one tempts him three times:

The First Temptation appeals to Jesus’ physical hunger; we can imagine how hungry he must have been after fasting for 40 days.

In the Second Temptation, the devil quotes from Psalm 91 and urges Jesus to jump off the parapet of the temple letting the good angels save him. This is the sin of presumption.

In the Third Temptation, the devil appeals to a sense of power – riches and dominion in exchange for recognition of the evil one. Idolatry is the sin here.

Jesus defeats the devil in three key areas of human weakness: the sensual appetite, self-inflation, and the will for power; universal attractions then and now. Jesus deals with each temptation quickly and effectively. He neither mulls over each nor does he engage in a debate with the devil. Nor should we!!

CONCLUSION

Shepherd of our souls,

Bless us in this holy season of Lent.

Show us where we need conversion and renewal.

Guide us through the traps and temptations that afflict us,
and secure us in your love and mercy.

AMEN.

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