

March 10, 2019

Dt 26:4-10; Rom 10:8-13; Lk 4:1-13

We like to believe that we should always be in control of the world around us. We can have a great tendency to reach out for things that give us a promise of the control and power that we lack. In the Gospel today, Jesus gives us an example of where true power comes from, and the strange way in which denying the quick fixes actually brings us a greater reward in the end - this is a great lesson of Lent and one that the Church invites us to experience during this season.

We hear in the Gospel that Jesus is *led into the desert*. The desert is a place of lifelessness, of danger, of possible pain. It is a place where you can run out of what you need. We all have this experience here in our own lives. Some people are poor and experience being in the desert with respect to food and shelter, others are in the desert thirsting for recognition or love or friendship. We may be in the desert with respect to reaching a goal that we want to have - feeling like there are many miles of aren wasteland between us and our goal. Jesus enters that desert we hear *filled with the Holy Spirit*. We can forget that when we walk in the daily deserts of life that the Holy Spirit of God is with us - whether we know it or not.

The Devil's subtle promise to Jesus - and to us - is that he will take away his want, he will satisfy his need, he will get him to his goal. He implies that satisfaction is only as far away as following him (and pushing God to the side). First, the Devil goes to Jesus most immediate needs. We read that Jesus had been fasting for 40 days and was hungry. The Devil says: *If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread*. He is tempting Jesus to use whatever means he has to get what he wants. He is telling him not to wait for God go take care of you - do it yourself. The weird implication is that if you do it without God you will prove yourself to be a loyal child of God - the opposite is actually true. Jesus responds that material things and bodily wants are not the most important thing. He indicates that faith in God will bring him what he needs: *It is written, One does not live on bread alone*. Sometimes we place the satisfaction of our needs in such a high place that we try to take care of alone before waiting for God to work.

The Devil's second tactic is to promise what he really can't deliver (the Devil lies, by the way). He says: *I shall give to you all this power and glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I may give it to whomever I wish*. Actually the only way any of the things was handed to the Devil is by the sin of humans. God gave Adam and Eve all the good things of the Earth, they gave it over so the Devil could manipulate humans with them. Jesus as heir to the Kingdom is already due to get everything at the end of time. What the Devil is essentially saying is "why

wait for God to give things to you, come to me and I'll get it for you quicker." It is like Jesus is the one to whom a house is given in a will and he will get it some day. He comes to the house and a tenant in the house (who doesn't own it) says to him "I will give all this to you for \$1,000,000 dollars." It is ridiculous. What's more, the Devil's price for selling Jesus what is already his is for him to abandon God completely, he says: *All this will be yours, if you worship me*. Jesus refuses to abandon his Father, and the promises made to him by his Father, to try to get now what he will get later. Jesus responds: *You shall worship the Lord, your God, and him alone shall you serve*. We too have an inheritance to come as adopted sons and daughters. We will be tempted to abandon God and throw it away for a promise that can't be actually delivered?

The Devil's third trick is to tell Jesus to not worry about doing foolish and harmful things. He says to Jesus: *If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here* (the top of the Temple to the stones below), *for it is written: He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you*. Essentially he is saying: "you can do what I say, you can do the thing that your better nature tells you is suicidal, you can follow all the voices of the world and do what ever you want no matter the potential consequences - if God is really God, God will just fix it all and you won't actually get hurt." This is one of the biggest lies the Devil tells us: "Don't worry there will be no consequences - or at least - don't worry, you'll definitely escape the consequences." But this denies the actual reality of a life that puts God to the side, and tells God "I'll do it without you." A life that willfully denies God. If we tell God "I give up all claim to what is in the will, this guy is going to give me the house now for \$1,000,000." What do you think will happen when that guy is evicted from the house and your name is no longer in the will. Jesus talks about this in other places. It's a lie that there are no consequences for foolishness.

The solution to our anxieties is not to find a con man like the Devil to give us a shortcut. The solution is not to find an "it's too good to be true" deal from the world and it's philosophies (because it really is not true). The solution is to do as Jesus did. Remain faithful to God and offer your best energies and efforts to God as God directs. These energies and efforts we can call our "firstfruits." This term comes from the Old Testament sacrifices where one offered the best to God first, and then used the rest. This is the way to the goal. We heard in the first reading: *Therefore, I have now brought you the firstfruits of the products of the soil which you, O LORD, have given me. And having set them before the Lord, [my] God, [I] shall bow down in his presence.*" Lent calls on us to use prayer, self denial, and giving to others to help us to not trust in ourselves or con men, but to give freely, serve God, and trust in the Lord to provide for us in the deserts of life. We are reminded in the second reading: *No one who believes in him will be put to shame. For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."*