

My Dear people of God,

We have just begun the holy season of Lent. This holy season, launches us on a journey to Easter, where we celebrate the resurrection, the gift and reality of eternal life. The Lenten journey is a journey of **Prayer, Self-denial and Good works**.

In today's gospel reading, we have the account of Jesus in the desert where is confronted by temptations from the devil. **Jesus faced temptation from Satan. We face temptation!** In Jesus' 40 days of solitude in the desert wilderness, He confronts Satan and unmasks his temptations and conquers him. Lent is therefore a time of spiritual combat against the spirit of evil. We place ourselves decisively on the path of Jesus and the road that leads to life (eternal life). The path of Jesus passed through the desert, the place where the voice of God and the voice of the tempter, the devil were heard. It is a path where our destiny is truly played out; a destiny of either eternal life or eternal death.

As we begin this journey, a good question to ask is: ***How do we hear and respond to the voice of God?*** We hear it in His word. For this reason, it is important to know His Word, Sacred Scripture because otherwise, we do not know how to react to the snares of the devil. Therefore to read the Word of God every day and to meditate upon it is very important. The Word of God will then help us during this Lenten journey and indeed throughout our lives to say NO to sin and worldliness and to instead make courageous choices in accordance with the Gospel and to strengthen solidarity with others. Let us focus a little more on the gospel and Jesus' struggle against temptation.

The temptation of Jesus sometimes comes to question as some ask the question; ***was He not the Son of God and as such above the rest of us (including temptation)?*** To claim that Jesus was some kind of super human being is to miss the whole point of the mystery of the Incarnation. In the Letter to the Hebrews, we read that Jesus was made completely like His brothers and sisters. In Him we have a high priest who can feel our weaknesses with us; for He was tempted in every way that we are, though He is without sin (Heb. 4:15; 2:17-18).

The temptation of Jesus was no play acting. It was real. The temptations of Jesus are the temptations of Christians in all ages, namely: to live for material things alone; to seek one's own glory rather than God's glory; and to abandon the worship of God for the worship of worldly power and fame. In the same vein, Jesus' victory over Satan was not a once and for all victory. Rather, He had won a battle, not the war. There would be other attacks that would need to be repelled. The same is true for all of us. Some people think that they should reach a stage when they will be beyond temptation. Jesus never reached that stage, nor did the saints!

My dear brothers and sisters, because Jesus Himself has been through temptation, He can empathize with us in our struggles with temptation. And because He was victorious over temptation, He can and does help us to be victorious too. Therefore we can approach Jesus in confidence, knowing that we shall have mercy from Him and find grace in our time of need. There is nothing we cannot master with the help of the One who strengthens us.

All of us are weak and prone to evil. This may be a disturbing truth, but it is one that we ignore at our own peril. The great problem of our time is our failure to know ourselves, to recognize evil and deal with it within ourselves. Yet there is a kind of comfort and freedom in knowing and accepting this humbling truth. Not only do we have to struggle with the evil in our individual lives, but we also have to struggle against the evil that is in others and in society. The hardest of this is

the struggle against the evil that originates inside us. Sometimes we excuse bad behavior by saying, “*Its just human nature*”. But we believe that humanity as created by God is good. Religious faith is intended not only to confirm us as we are, but also to affirm our desire to become something more.

My dear brothers and sisters, as we begin this Lenten journey, let us commit to fighting and overcoming temptation in our lives. Most of us, when facing temptation, may resist a little, but eventually give in, especially in the area of our ‘favorite’ sins! We want to change, but do not do enough to change. I like to use the illustration of our physical selves; muscles only grow when they resist. Temptation is there to teach us to resist. Here are a few practical steps: first of all, know your greatest weakness; secondly know when you are weakest (Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired). With that, I would recommend that each one identify their biggest sin and battle it this Lenten season.

Thanks and God bless

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