

First Sunday of Lent – March 5, 2017 – Good Shepherd Parish

Scripture Reading: Genesis 2:7-9; 3:1-7

The LORD God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being. Then the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and placed there the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground the LORD God made various trees grow that were delightful to look at and good for food, with the tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Now the serpent was the most cunning of all the animals that the LORD God had made. The serpent asked the woman, "Did God really tell you not to eat from any of the trees in the garden?" The woman answered the serpent: "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; it is only about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God said, 'You shall not eat it or even touch it, lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman: "You certainly will not die! No, God knows well that the moment you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods who know what is good and what is evil." The woman saw that the tree was good for food, pleasing to the eyes, and desirable for gaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate it; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

Psalm: Ps 51:3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 17

R. (cf. 3a) Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.

Have mercy on me, O God, in your goodness;
in the greatness of your compassion wipe out my
offense.

Thoroughly wash me from my guilt
and of my sin cleanse me.

For I acknowledge my offense,
and my sin is before me always:
"Against you only have I sinned,
and done what is evil in your sight."

A clean heart create for me, O God,
and a steadfast spirit renew within me.
Cast me not out from your presence,
and your Holy Spirit take not from me.

Give me back the joy of your salvation,
and a willing spirit sustain in me.
O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth shall proclaim your praise.

Scripture Reading: Romans 5:12-19

Brothers and sisters: Through one man sin entered the world, and through sin, death, and thus death came to all men, inasmuch as all sinned - for up to the time of the law, sin was in the world, though sin is not accounted when there is no law. But death reigned from Adam to

Moses, even over those who did not sin after the pattern of the trespass of Adam, who is the type of the one who was to come. But the gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one, the many died, how much more did the grace of God and the gracious gift of the one man Jesus Christ overflow for the many. And the gift is not like the result of the one who sinned. For after one sin there was the judgment that brought condemnation; but the gift, after many transgressions, brought acquittal. For if, by the transgression of the one, death came to reign through that one, how much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of justification come to reign in life through the one Jesus Christ. In conclusion, just as through one transgression condemnation came upon all, so, through one righteous act, acquittal and life came to all. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so, through the obedience of the one, the many will be made righteous.

Gospel: Matthew 4:1-11

At that time Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was hungry. The tempter approached and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become loaves of bread." He said in reply, "It is written: One does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes forth from the mouth of God." Then the devil took him to the holy city, and made him stand on the parapet of the temple, and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written: He will command his angels concerning you and with their hands they will support you, lest you dash your foot against a stone." Jesus answered him, "Again it is written, You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test." Then the devil took him up to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in their magnificence, and he said to him, "All these I shall give to you, if you will prostrate yourself and worship me." At this, Jesus said to him, "Get away, Satan! It is written: The Lord, your God, shall you worship and him alone shall you serve." Then the devil left him and, behold, angels came and ministered to him.

Prayer for a New Bishop

Heavenly Father,

You have blessed our diocese time and again with good and holy bishops who have led us ever closer to you. Aware of your profound love for us, we ask you to bless us once again. Send us a good and holy man to become our next bishop. Inspire us, the clergy, religious and the laity of the diocese to work generously with him so that we might grow together in your love and continue the good work you have begun in us for the sake of all. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.

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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

Lent is here. Jesus is tempted, as are we. But it is often difficult to understand the scriptural temptations, as found in the Gospel. Let us look at them. They will help us with our own. (1) First is *food*. Jesus has been on a major fast, and the devil knows it. "Don't worry!" he says. "You are rich! You are God! You can have all the food you want. Just turn this rock into bread!" "The Father's words are bread enough for me," Jesus says. (2) Second, what about *honor*? The devil says, "You can be the great one whom everyone respects! Think about how good that would feel. Side with me! OK, technically you would be worshipping me, but if you understand things my way, you are just taking care of 'number one.' *Try it.*" Jesus' quiet response: "I pledge myself to the Lord my God, not to you. Such honors would tear me apart." (3) Third, *pride*. The devil: "You know that heaven must do whatever you command! Jump off this temple roof and prove your importance! Angels will rush down from heaven to catch you! Everyone will admire you! Come on, show us what you've got!" Jesus: "Yes I am very close to heaven and to God. But hear this. I choose to let God's gentle, quiet love be my life. Not pride."

Could this Lent be the right time to unscramble your values?

Three temptations and three balanced, humble answers. Jesus knew how to hear his Abba's words over the devil's babble, and he would not desert the great love of his life, God. The devil, canny, resolves to try again later (on the cross). This analysis should make it easier to understand our own temptations. Check it out this Lent: possessions, cars, books, clothes, appearance, and so on. You know the kind of list we could each make: eating too much, buying too much, sexual lures, holding our tongue when fairness demands that we speak out, speaking out when we should be quiet. OK, these are just human foibles but they are also traps. "Look away from God," they say. "He is outmoded anyway. Be interested in yourself. No one else is." And honors? Do you ever try to please other people so they will have a good opinion of you? We used to call this "human respect." What would happen if your son or daughter were thrown off the team at school? How did you react when you lost your job? And so on. Americans still sit at their desks or cars or kitchen tables, working hard, worrying about meetings and deadlines, wondering if they can live up to their own expectations and those of others or how to just keep their jobs. We say we have essential work to do. We are important. What we do makes us worthwhile. Temptations.

Could this Lent be the right time to unscramble your values? Since God is the most wonderful and loving being anywhere, do you really want to block him out with lesser, undependable desires, especially those that boil down to riches, honors or pride? Isn't this true: whatever really counts in your life is actually rooted in the love of God and not the other way around. Here is how Jesus put it: "Love the Lord your God above all things and love your neighbor as yourself" (Mk 12:30-31).

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. After their sin, Adam and Eve wanted to cover their bodies. They did not want to be seen as they really were. Is it easy to be honest about faults? If you do become honest about your failings, what is the next step?
2. We hear at Easter, "O happy fault! O necessary sin of Adam, which gained for us so great a Redeemer!" St. Paul says in Sunday's reading, "But the gift is not like the transgression" (like killing a roach with a nuclear weapon). Why do you think God would go to this extreme to save us?
3. Right after Jesus was baptized and heard the Father's voice calling him "My Beloved Son," the Spirit led him to the desert. Jesus probably wanted to think about what those words meant, and to pray about his ministry. The Spirit wanted him to be tested. How does it make you feel to think he had to fight temptation the same way you do?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

Grant, almighty God, through the yearly observances of holy Lent, that we may grow in understanding of the riches hidden in Christ and by worthy conduct pursue their effects. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen