

Homily on the first Sunday of lent – 2021

[Gn 9:8-15](#); [1 Pt 3:18-22](#); [Mk 1:12-15](#)

God is with us in moments of temptation

Dearly Beloved, I welcome you on this first Sunday of Lent. On the first Sunday of Lent, the Gospel reading in each Lectionary cycle, is always about the temptation story of Jesus in the desert. This is one of the passages that can be found in all of the Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke. These three Gospels agree that after Jesus was baptized, He was driven by the Spirit into the desert. And once there, He was tempted by the devil. In cycle B, we read from the Gospel of St. Mark.

St. Mark's account only gives a summarized version of the temptation story without any details. Let's just have another look at the Gospel.

*"The Spirit drove Jesus out into the desert,
and he remained in the desert for forty days,
tempted by Satan.*

*He was among wild beasts,
and the angels ministered to him.*

*After John had been arrested,
Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God:*

"This is the time of fulfillment.

The kingdom of God is at hand.

Repent, and believe in the gospel."

Why did Mark use such few words? What is he trying to say to us here?" Generally speaking, Mark is the most "economical" with the use of words, in his style of writing. He employs few words and is quite direct, so we can be pretty sure that every word, and every phrase is packed full of spiritual meaning. Our challenge therefore, is to extract the meaning in his succinct message and apply it to our own lives, as Christians.

Of course, we know that Jesus was tempted for 40 days in the wilderness—that's part of the Biblical inspiration for the 40 days of Lent that we began just a few days ago on Ash Wednesday. But how often do we reflect on the second part of that verse, about Jesus "*being with the wild beasts*" and "*being served and supported by angels*?" What does that mean, for Jesus and for us? As we make this Lenten journey, our focus should not only be on the "beasts" of our lives that cause us to struggle; but, most importantly, we need to focus on the ministry of God's graces through His angels, which we often overlook. It is a temptation in itself to always focus on your weaknesses and be sorry for them. And many good Christians succumb to this "beast." Such a response will always make you look 'down' instead of looking 'up.' God knows how weak you are, but to move on, learn to look up to Him and don't be so frustrated about how bad things have been for you and overly critical of yourself.

After the temptation, Mark tells us

Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the Gospel of God:

"This is the time of fulfillment.

*The kingdom of God is at hand.
Repent, and believe in the gospel."*

Pause for just a moment and ask yourself what is the Gospel. All these years, what have you believed is the "Gospel." I do remember, last week Deacon Jose shared a passage that explains God's response to suffering and pain. John 3:16 *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life."*

The Gospel message is that simple. God loves you so much that He will stop at nothing to save you. No matter who you are and what you have done. But He will not force it on you. Because love does not coerce or compel.

In the first reading from the book of Genesis, we heard the story of the covenant God made with Noah. It is a covenant where God promises that He will never forget us, nor any of the creatures that He made. God promises never again to destroy the earth because of the sinfulness of man with a "flood," and as a sign of this covenant - this promise - God creates the rainbow so that whenever it rains, God and all of us here who see it will remember that promise. Not only that, but most importantly we are now being saved by the waters of baptism.

It is a covenant without any "if" clauses, such as "if you love me" or "if you obey me" or "if you worship me" or "if you brush your teeth" or help old ladies across the street - then I will be good to you! No, this is an unconditional covenant. He will be there for you even if you do not care about Him. That is what God's love is like, He remembers us even when we forget Him. Again, no matter what we have done - when we stand at the door and knock, God won't ask "who's there" He will instead open the door and welcome us in.

This does not mean, that the evil we do does not grieve Him; they do, and very much so. Despite all that we do to hurt each other and to hurt ourselves, God has promised not to abandon us. He does not want any of us to perish, but have eternal life. That is the Good news.

Dearly Beloved, the desert marks the beginning of Jesus' battle with Satan; the ultimate test will be in Jesus' final hours on the cross. In a similar way, our Lenten observances are only a beginning, a preparation for and a reinforcement of our ongoing struggle to resist the temptations we face in our lives. During Lent, we are led by the Holy Spirit to remember the vows of Baptism in which we promised to reject sin and to follow Jesus. Jesus gives us the example that all manner of temptations can be overcome. Just as Jesus was ministered to by the angels, God also supports us in our struggle against sin and temptation. We succeed because Jesus conquered sin once and for all, in His saving death on the cross. We are not alone, but members of His victorious body. Victory is always assured, only be focused and believe in the Gospel. God loves you and I do too.