**First Sunday of Lent**

**Cycle A**

Gen.2:7-9, 16-18, 25; 3:1-7; Rom. 5: 12-19; Mt. 4: 1-11

March 12/13, 2001

As you can tell our readings today as we begin Lent speak of temptation: Satan tempting Eve in the paradise of Eden, and Satan tempting Jesus in the desert.

Temptations….. Not exactly a topic that brings a smile to our faces, but the Church asks us to reflect upon them today.

Temptations come to every one of us. No one is spared them. No matter how hard we try, we can’t avoid them really. We are going to be tempted. Whether we are in the paradise of our lives, so to speak, or in the loneliness of the desert, they will come. So what are they?

First of all, they are NOT sins. Just because you are tempted does not mean that you have sinned. The good thing about temptation is that they can become opportunities to develop virtue, opportunities for us to turn more completely to God and away from sin. The bad thing about them is that they can lead us to sin. They are deceptions – lies -- that come from the devil. They conceal the truth from us. They offer us something that may look good but actually entice us toward selfishness. They lure us into doing something that does not reflect our dignity as sons and daughters of God. Temptations give us the illusion of a quick fix, but in reality they are a quick disaster.

The first reading tells us that the devil is a cunning creature. He will always try to plant a doubt in our minds, doubts about what we know and believe. Remember what he said to Eve? *“Did God really say….?”* Remember what he said to Jesus? *“If you are the Son of God…”* Satan wants so much to cloud our minds, to mess up our thinking. He is an expert in this. He knows full well that if he can do this, then we will make poor decisions and our lives will become more and more upsetting, our passions and emotions will begin to take over. As soon as he plants the doubt he will tell a lie; he will try to get us to believe something that if we were to take the time to think, we would realize it was a lie. If we fall for it we will become very unhappy, and we will begin to hide and make excuses. His ultimate goal is to get us to fall so many times that we become numb to it all, or that we despair of God’ love.

***We must not fall for his trickery!*** Every time we are tempted we have a choice: either to turn toward sin like Adam and Eve or to practice virtue like Jesus.

You might think we have different temptations than Eve or different temptations than Jesus. In fact, we are all tempted in similar ways because it is Satan who tempts us all. Our readings speak of three of them.

**Temptation One**: *Feed the body and starve the soul.*

Isn’t this a big one in our society today? We worship the body. We want physical perfection, we want to look different than we do, and we want to be trimmer, fitter, more beautiful and youthful. We spend millions of dollars trying to do this but we seem lost when it comes to feeding our souls.

Eve was tempted to eat the fruit because she thought it would be good nourishment for her body. Remember what she thought? “She saw it was good for food and pleasing to the eye.”

Jesus was tempted to turn stones into bread to feed his hungry body after a 40 day fast.

**Temptation Two**: *Be filled with pride and empty of gratitude.*

You know, we live in a splendid world, and we are richly blessed. The world has so many good people in it. There is so much beauty. We are members of the Catholic Church that offers us unimaginable opportunities of grace through the sacraments. Are we grateful for all of these blessings? Or do we in our pride demand more?

Eve was living in the paradise of Eden, yet she was tempted to be ungrateful for all the goodness around her. She was tempted to deny the beauty of her own humanity. She was tempted to want more, to be a god. “You will be like gods!” Satan told her.

Jesus was tempted to deny his humanity, his human nature, in effect to ***deny the Incarnation***. The devil wanted him to throw himself off the temple. He wanted to trick Jesus into thinking such a fall would not kill him. O how much Satan wished Jesus would have taken that jump and died then and there. It would have thwarted God’s plan of salvation for him die on the cross!

**Temptation Three**: *Worship false gods and deny your status as a son or daughter of God.*

We all worship false gods, at least once in a while. We are tempted to think that our judgment is better than God’s, that we can pick and choose which teaching of Jesus and the Church to follow, to trust public opinion more than the teaching of Jesus and his Church. This is especially true in the moral life and the moral teachings of the Church.

Eve was tempted to believe that Satan knew better than God and that she should obey him, not God. Remember how Satan told her, “O no! You will not die!” contradicting what God had decreed.

Jesus was tempted this time not to deny his humanity, but to deny his divinity and his divine mission as the Son of God by falling down in worship before Satan. Essentially, Jesus was tempted to deny the Truth and betray his Father.

Adam and Eve fell for the temptations and in doing so committed the ***original sin*** inherited by all of us at birth.

But Jesus is the New Adam who overcomes the sin of the first Adam. The Virgin Mary is the New Eve who cooperates with God’s plan of salvation unlike the first Eve who wrecked God’s plan.

My friends, this truly is ***Good News!*** Lent is a time for *freedom* from sinand *victory* over temptation. Lent’s culmination is Easter when Jesus conquers forever sin and death.

Lent is a time for us to be set free from sin and to be strengthened in virtue. The Church has given us the three ***pillars of Lent*** to help us.

***Fasting***: feeding our souls more than our bodies. We are to eat only one full meal on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. Those who are 59 and over are exempt as are those who are sick. We are also to abstain from meat on Ash Wednesday and all Fridays of Lent.

***Almsgiving:*** We are to give away some of our material possessions to the poor to express our gratitude to God for his multiple blessings.

***Prayer:*** We are to frequently put ourselves in God’s presence by praying. We are to be at Mass each Sunday, and then make a sincere effort to come more often. We are to attend as best we can the Lenten services the parish will offer. We all need to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation during the Lenten and Easter seasons.

Yes, fasting, prayer and almsgiving are the three pillars of Lent, pillars against temptation, pillars that free us from selfishness and pride. They are the Lenten pillars of freedom and victory over the power of Satan.

Above all, we are to give up sin during Lent because we love Jesus and when we give in to temptation and sin, we hurt Jesus. Every time we sin we are the soldiers scourging Jesus at the pillar during his Passion. Every time we sin we are giving a slap to the face of Jesus. Every time we sin, we put a crown of thorns on his head. Every time we sin, we are the soldiers driving the nails into his hands and feet. We want to give up sin because we love Jesus.

Take the time, my brothers and sisters, to feed your souls this Lent.

Take the time to be filled with gratitude for God’s blessings.

Take the time to seek the greatness of a humble spirit in prayer before our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!