

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

Dear Parishioners:

On the first Sunday of Lent the Gospel reading told us about how Jesus Christ Himself was tempted by the devil. When I was preparing my homily on this Gospel the question occurred to me: “when he wrote the Gospel, how did St. Luke know about how Jesus was tempted since no one was with Jesus when it happened?” St. Luke probably never actually met Jesus Himself, so Jesus didn't tell him about it. The story may have come to Luke through the Blessed Virgin Mary who tradition tells us provided Luke with some of the details of Jesus' life. Or maybe, after Jesus had gathered the Apostles, He told them about His experience. In either case, it would mean that Jesus must have been the first one to tell the story. Which raises other questions... Why did Jesus tell His Mother or the Apostles about His temptation? What did He hope they might learn from His experience? I can almost imagine Jesus saying to Mary, “Mom, I had the strangest experience in the desert after I was baptized.” Or perhaps, telling His Apostles “Guys, let me tell you about the power of the devil.” I think Jesus must have told others the story to remind us that His whole mission, His life, death and resurrection, are ultimately about **the fight between God and Satan**, the battle of good versus evil. This battle is going on all the time around us and within us. The Bible teaches us that when our first parents, Adam & Eve, fell for the devil's temptation, the human race lost it's battle with Satan. We also lost the spiritual freedom God wants us to have. There was a terrible loss because as long as our spirits are free we can do anything and if they are not, no matter how we are doing materially, we are slaves. Jesus Christ, the Son of God and our Savior entered human history in order to **fight for us and to win back for us the spiritual freedom** that was lost through original sin. This Jesus did by being obedient even unto death on the cross.

Therefore, as the followers of Christ we should continually ask ourselves if we are walking in the spiritual freedom from sin and fear that Jesus has won for us? Or have we allowed ourselves to be shackled by thoughts and behaviors that weigh us down? As St. Paul points out what restricts our freedom most is not external things but our own misdirected desires. This season of Lent is a time for refocusing our attention on Christ and with His grace reasserting our spiritual freedom. So, on the Sundays of Lent I will be talking about how the Lord enables us to live in spiritual freedom. Now **the first step in spiritual freedom is remembering who we are**. We need to remember our true identity as the children of God. That was why Jesus came—to tell us who we are and to help us maintain our identity against the temptations of the devil. In our Gospel reading today Jesus shows us by His own example how this is done.

As we see in the temptation of Jesus, **Satan seeks to destroy our bond with God our Father**. In two of the temptations, Satan tries to undermine Jesus' sense of His own identity by saying “*If you are the Son of God...*” The devil does the same thing to us by trying to get us to ignore our relationship with God. Satan wants us to forget that we are made in God's image and that God has redeemed us from sin by the cross of Christ. We have a dignity that comes from God and every form of sin means lowering ourselves down from that dignity. It can be easy for us to forget these things because ever since the fall of Adam we are prone to sin. However, when tempted we should remind ourselves, “*By the grace of God, I am better than this.*” Now if we look at the specific temptations proposed by Satan we will see that Jesus was subjected to the same basic temptations that the devil uses to attack us. We can also see how by following Christ's example, we can resist them.

The first temptation, for bread in a time of hunger, is **the temptation to allow His hunger, His appetite, to overrule His faithfulness** to the plan of God our Father. It is a temptation we all face. Our appetites for food and physical pleasure are good and necessary to preserve life and to bring forth new life. But when we make them our highest priority, we become slaves to them and we lose our freedom as the children of God. So many of our social problems— family breakdowns, crime, poverty, drugs, Aids and abortion — are the result of people letting their appetites run wild and enslaving them in the process. When it comes to the temptations of

our appetites Jesus says to Satan and to us, man cannot live for his physical appetites alone but only for the truth that comes from God. We are called to live for our spiritual appetite for love and the highest form of love is love for God.

In the second temptation Satan offers Jesus **all worldly power. We of course can be bought for much less.** Maybe just a larger income, a bigger house and a few more material things. The devil doesn't insist that we actually get down on our knees and pray to him. He just tempts us to accept his way of doing things, which is a way of worshiping him. He suggests that just a few lies that will advance our interests. Perhaps subtly manipulating people around us or cheating a little at work or on our taxes. Then there is the constant temptation to criticize others so that we can feel better about ourselves. The devil doesn't really ask us to do that much to get what we want. All we have to do is put our desires first even when they conflict with the ways of God. Again, we see by Jesus' example that the response to this temptation is to remember that we live for God and to give our worship to anyone else, including ourselves, is wrong.

The third temptation Jesus faced was to make a spectacle of Himself by jumping from the temple and being saved by the angels. It was the **temptation to seek popularity.** Had Jesus done this He would have been accepted instantly by thousands of people. Most of us aren't looking for celebrity status. The admiration of our family, friends, neighbors and coworkers would be sufficient. And I'm sure that just about all of us can think of things we have done that were contrary to what the Lord asks of us, just so we would look good in the eyes of others. And to those temptations Jesus responds by reminding us that the love God has for us should never be tested by our desire to impress somebody else.

As our Lord's own experience shows, there's a war on between God and Satan and all of us are involved in the battle. When Satan tempts us with promises of pleasure, power and popularity, **our first defense against these temptations is remembering who we are. Holding fast to our identity as the redeemed children of God our Father is the first step in preserving the spiritual freedom that Jesus has won for us.** This is why regular personal prayer and our gathering to worship God together are so important. They help us to be aware of God's presence in our lives and of our identity as His children. And should we fall for these temptations the Lord has also given us the Sacrament of Confession so we can break the chains of sin the devil is trying to place on us.

This Gospel passage ends by saying that after Jesus resisted him in the desert; Satan left Jesus "for a time." Satan would be back again to tempt Him. It is a reminder that this side of heaven we will always have to fight against temptation. But **when we remember who we are and rely on God's grace** to answer our needs, we will be able to walk in **the spiritual freedom** that Jesus has won for us.

With my prayers,

Fr. Conley