

The First Sunday of Lent February 14, 2016

As always, our first Sunday Gospel of Lent begins with an account of the Temptation of Jesus in the Desert. Of course, for us Lent is nothing like spending forty days in a scorched and burning desert; but that doesn't mean that our *spiritual* deserts are any less real.

Scripture consistently tells us that the desert is the place where God is especially near. The desert is the place where, stripped of all that normally nourishes and supports us, we're exposed to chaos, fear, and demons of every kind. In the desert we're exposed, body and soul, we're made vulnerable to be overwhelmed by chaos and temptations of every kind.

Our temptations are perhaps less dramatic than those Jesus faced, but they are entangled in the same human dilemma that Jesus shared in three specific ways.

First, we're tempted to rearrange reality instead of living it like it is; second, we're tempted to follow secular rules and not God's; third, we're tempted to insist on a safety net. All three temptations are reducible to one: distrust of God.

But even more basic than that, perhaps the greatest temptation we face in our desert experience is to forget that it's Satan who tries to destroy our trust in God and isn't only the instigator of Jesus' temptations, but ours as well.

It's the Evil One who tricks us and clouds our reason and so makes that which is false look like the truth and truth appears to be false. It's been said that Satan's greatest victory over the modern world happened when he convinced good and intelligent

people that he doesn't exist, that he's not to be feared, that there is no longer anything sinful.

Never mind those in our culture who hate religion, but what if *we* don't believe in Satan's influence, then how can we possibly hope to defend themselves?

And yet, all of us can see the effects of Satan's work; we see him working in the very same way he has always worked. He simply suggests that Divine Law is a myth. He tries to make humanity believe that we know better than God, or even believe that there is no God.

He tries to make sin and death seem like a good thing. So, we find that euthanasia begins to be seen as something merciful. Abortion begins to be seen as a personal right, a defense against an unwanted medical condition known as pregnancy.

A fetus is seen to be simply a mass of human protoplasm. The gift of human sexuality now takes on the character of entertainment. Violence becomes the solution to every problem. And so it goes, on and on.

In this twisting of perception, Truth must necessarily become relative... a personal opinion, not a fact because if it's a fact, then right is right and wrong is wrong whether we think so or not. Evil must hide itself in confusion and lies.

But as today's readings continue, we find that God would not be defeated, nor would His creation be ruined by the deceit of the devil. God's love is too strong and His justice too perfect to be foiled by Satan's trickery.

But there's one thing more we need to know. Whether the prince of lies works within us or outside of us, he cannot make us sin. We can resist temptation.

Every one of us has various temptations in our lives. And with the help of the Holy Spirit, every one of us has the ability to beat them back. There's no need to buy

into the devil's lies if we allow the Holy Spirit to help us through prayer and frequent celebration of the sacraments.

But we have to want to resist temptation. We have to be determined to do the Will of God the same as Jesus was determined to do the will of the Father. That's why so many people approach the sacrament of penance during Lent.

They do so because they find that along with the forgiveness of sins, the grace of the sacrament strengthens our resolution to avoid sin.

So during these forty days we need to ask ourselves a few questions. How determined are we to live the Life of the Lord? Do we really want to fight off temptation? Do we really want to be healed? We pray for strength during Lent, strength not just to fight off evil, but also to want to fight it off.