Sunday of 3rd Week of Lent

LUST

"Humility is the safeguard of chastity. In the matter of purity, there is no greater danger than not fearing danger." – St. Philip Neri

ST JEROME

St. Jerome became fluent in Latin and Greek, and read the literatures of those languages with great pleasure. He acquired many worldly ideas, made little effort to check his pleasure-loving instincts, and lost much of the piety that had been instilled in him at home. Yet in spite of the pagan and hedonistic influences around him, Jerome was baptized by Pope Liberius in 360. This began his conversion process.

In a letter to the virgin St. Eustochium, he wrote, "How often when I was living in the desert, in the vast solitude which gives to hermits a savage dwelling place, parched by a burning sun, how often did I fancy myself among the pleasures of Rome! ... Now, although in my fear of Hell I had consigned myself to this prison, where I had no companions but scorpions and wild beasts, I often found myself amid bevies of girls. My face was pale and my frame chilled with fasting; yet my mind was burning with desire, and the fires of lust kept bubbling up before me when my flesh was as good as dead. Helpless, I cast myself at the feet of Jesus; I wa-tered them with my tears; I wiped them with my hair; and then I subdued my rebellious body with weeks of abstinence .... " Knowing that one of the best ways to rid oneself of sinful thoughts is to replace them with holy or morally acceptable ideas, Jerome attempted to distract himself from sexual temptations by learning Hebrew (a project that also helped him become a great scholar).

Lust is the deadly sin whose false God is pleasure or making a person one's God. When St. Jerome started to read Latin in Greek he learned to seek pleasure and women over God. Lust can be a language or love can be a language depending on if we choose to communicate with a false God or the one true God. Just as learning languages opened St. Jerome to lust, it would be learning a language that delivered him from lust. As he learned Hebrew and studied scripture the false Gods of his past were replaced with a love of scripture. Jerome fell in love with the Word of God in scripture and so through scripture fell in love with the person of Jesus Christ. He was then inspired to make scripture accessible in Latin so others could fall in love with God as he had. How have words or images led you into lust but how can they also lead you to God?

For your prayer

St. Jerome would have prayed with John 4: 5-42. Use your imagination as you slowly read John 4: 5-42. Please reflect on how Jesus never fell into lust because he always saw the whole person. Reflect on how your true desire is not for pleasure or a person but for the love of God especially in scripture.