

Fr. John Sassani
Homily Given February 10, 2008
First Sunday of Lent - Liturgical Year A

The experiences recounted in the Sacred Scripture today may seem remote to us – Adam and Eve in the Garden, Jesus in the desert. They seem to be not only distant from our life but opposite to each other, only linked by temptation.

The word “temptation” may have a funny ring to it. Unless we grew up in a Catholic school or had unusually scrupulous parents, I suspect it’s a term we barely notice except in the Lord’s Prayer. However, the experience of the garden and the desert, I think, are familiar experiences to many of us.

The familiarity comes with the three-way internal dialogue that we so often experience. The dialogue is between God, myself and...How shall we describe the third conversationalist?...Satan, the tempter, God’s evil twin, my alter ego...None of those names or descriptions, in my estimation, work so well. St. Ignatius refers to this third conversationalist as “the enemy of our human nature” – I like that – but these days, I call the third conversationalist the spirit or voice of sabotage. Its only goal is to sabotage the good I can do and the call God is issuing to me.

The readings show us how the voice of sabotage works. In Genesis, God has given permission for Adam and Eve to eat from all the trees in the garden. But God has prohibited them from eating from one tree – the tree of knowledge. The spirit of sabotage is the third conversationalist with Eve – and he turns the prohibition into an option, just a thought. She thinks about it; it seems like a good idea, to be like God. There would be no gardening, no work, only leisure. This thought becomes a passion and she acts – and everything is changed.

Fast forward to the desert – Jesus has been there for forty days without much food, and he’s very hungry – not just for food but for the Word of God. The tempter comes along and says – *God seems very silent and distant, but you, Jesus, are very faithful. God won’t mind if you turn that rock into focaccia bread. You’ll feel better, and even pray better too.* But Jesus knows better and chooses to remain faithful.

Lent is the season where we grapple with the interior conversation – so as to let the two primary partners, God and myself, dialogue with little interference from the spirit of sabotage.

St. Paul announces the good news – Christ is human like us, though he is also God’s son. Christ was able to resist the thoughts of the third conversationalist – and Christ offers us this same capability.

Lent calls us to think with Christ, to pray with Christ, and to act with Christ, so that we are better able to recognize and resist the thoughts of the third conversationalist. As we gather for the Eucharist today, let’s be grateful for this season of Lent and for Christ’s accompaniment.