

## March 10, 2019

### First Sunday of Lent

We read from the book of Deuteronomy on this first Sunday of Lent. Deuteronomy means “The second law”. We first hear about the Ten Commandments in the book of Exodus and Deuteronomy repeats the Ten Commandments and then applies them in a new way. Deuteronomy applies covenant of the Ten Commandments to the central story of the Old Testament, God’s covenant, the Exodus with the People of Israel from the oppression of Pharaoh in Egypt. The Ten Commandments and the Story of Exodus together form the central story or the creed if you will, of the Old Testament: “Follow God and His commandments and you will be free.” I grew up alongside a busy highway between Bellingham and Mt. Baker. We had a lot of dogs over the years and whenever one of our dogs escaped from our fenced back yard, they thought they had true freedom. All too often, they ran across the highway, which led to their death, hit by a car or a logging truck. Spiritually, that is how it is for us well. What we think is freedom, what we think is good, is what can lead to our spiritual death.

Jesus fulfills everything that God revealed to be true in the Old Testament. That is why the gospel of John calls Jesus “The Word made flesh.” Jesus leads us to true and lasting freedom. Each year on the first Sunday of Lent, we hear Jesus taking in his flesh our human experience of temptation. We hear story according to the Gospel of Luke in the fourth chapter today. Luke emphasizes that *The Holy Spirit* led Jesus into the desert to be tempted by the devil. The Holy Spirit led Jesus into devil’s hands to be tempted so that we could know that Jesus is our true freedom in our moment of temptation. Jesus lives in our hearts through our baptism. We have the power to call on his name in the temptation so that we can rely on his power to resist sin, and even when we fall, he will never fail to forgive us if we repent and turn to him in our weakness. He alone is our true power and freedom.

If we look closely at the three temptations, we can see that the devil was tempting Jesus to misuse the power the Father had given him. Is not that the temptation for us all, to misuse our God-given power? We are aware that this happens in families, in society and in the Church. That is the very reason why Pope Francis said at the Summit in Rome in February to address the issue of

sexual abuse in the Church that one cannot understand the issue of sexual abuse without looking at power because sexual abuse of minors is always the result of a misuse of power. He called for each episcopal conference in the world to establish concrete and effective measures to address issues of sexual abuse of minors and design protocols for handling accusations against bishops. Many have criticized Pope Francis for not being more direct in the Summit and not giving clear out-comes for these meetings. His first goal was to change hearts. Archbishop Charles Scicluna, who plays a critical role dealing with the sexual abuse crisis in the Church and attended the summit said in an interview with **America Magazine**, “We could see people maturing in their reactions as the days went by.... They were an intense three days, but the experiences of prayer, the listening to victims, the inputs we had were emotionally charged, so there was not only information but also an appeal to our emotional intelligence.”

The summit “spoke to the heart of people,” Archbishop Scicluna said. “I think that is where true transformation happens and where the motivation to do the right thing is born and develops.”

Pope Francis called the meeting precisely for this purpose—to bring about a change of hearts, a conversion, a worldwide cultural change among bishops and religious superiors, which also included the voices of women religious. The Pope knows that without such a change, all the papal decrees and changes in Vatican law are unlikely to achieve the desired goal of defeating sexual abuse inside the church. Follow-up measures will come, like the preparation of a handbook to serve as a guide for bishops across the world to deal with sexual abuse and cover-up. More and more Church leaders are saying that the change that the Church needs will only happen effectively done with consulting the expertise of laity, both men and women. The work of healing this wound will continue.

Spiritual freedom comes with a deep and profound conversion and real conversion takes time. The Israelites journeyed in the desert for 40 years and Jesus for 40 days. While we need to pay attention to editorials and opinion polls, that is not what leads us. Holy Spirit led Jesus in desert and the same is true for us.