**1st Sunday of Lent**
Cycle A, 3.1.20
Genesis 2:7-9;3:1-7/
Romans 5:12-19/Matthew 4:1-11

**TAKE ON LENT & FIND YOUR FOCUS**

Lent always begins by confronting temptation. We are all tempted. To be human is to be tempted. Jesus was tempted. Temptations always surround us in many different ways and if we are not careful, we sooner or later succumb. We are either foolish, ignorant or naïve if we think we are immune to temptation. And while in this life temptation cannot be avoided neither should we seek it.

The Tempter is always, unceasingly knocking on the door. But the Tempter, the Deceiver, has no real power. He cannot create or control anything. He can only manipulate us, seduce us or mislead us and that only if we are willing. We cannot be forced, but how often do we allow ourselves to be willingly misled, manipulated or seduced, just like Adam and Eve!?! Temptation is our looking through the peephole and liking what we see. Sin is opening the door, foolishly thinking that even after we have opened the door and welcomed the temptation into our home and lives, that we are somehow still in control.

Perhaps the biggest temptation for many of us is to do nothing. It is the temptation to not address areas in our lives where change, big or small, is needed, whether because we do not want the change or do not want to make the effort to change or think that we cannot make the change or avoid the change for some reason. There is a saying that the only thing necessary for evil to triumph is for good women and men to do nothing. Lent is all about confronting the temptations we have yielded to which have taken control of some part of our lives. We are all invited to make this Lent count for something in our lives, that when this Lent ends we will have made a lasting change, big or small, for the better in our lives.

Lent is often misunderstood. Frequently we may think of Lent as a time of depriving ourselves of things or habits we enjoy, like eating an occasional chocolate, as though Lent was just some kind of quarantine of good, fun things which gets lifted at Easter as we plunge back into them. We may make Lenten resolutions which in reality, even if we keep them, do not really change us into better persons.

A better understanding of Lent is that it is like a spring-cleaning. Lent is about cleaning out the dirt in lives as deeply as we can. Lent is a chance to examine our lives, confront our personal temptations, see where we have slacked off doing the things we know we need to do and Lent also is a time to try to eliminate or at least lessen...
the vices we have somehow come to embrace or allow to dominate us for whatever “justifiable” reason. Lent offers us the opportunity to examine our lives honestly and ask: “am I doing the simple, basic, regular things I know that I need to do in order to be my best self? How much time and energy am I spending on things or activities which are at best not helpful and at worst harmful?” Lent is about discovering or rediscovering the things for which we hunger and thirst and how those hungers and thirsts direct and dominate our daily schedules and lives.

Lent is about finding or finding again a balance. It is about lessening both excesses and scarcity in our lives. It is about realizing what we have too much of and too little of in our lives. Maybe we do not eat too much, but do we eat too much meat and starches and not enough fruits and vegetables? Maybe we do not get rip roaring drunk, but do we consume too much alcohol? Maybe our credit lines are not maxed out, but do we overspend, buying more than we need? Maybe we limit our time spent in front of the television or computer screen or playing video games, but how much silence is there in our lives? Maybe we have a lot of friends or followers on social media, but do we have one or two close personal friends with whom we regularly spend quality time? How much and what do we waste?

Adam and Eve had been warned not to eat the fruit of that one tree, but they did anyway. They were not starving or lack variety in their diet. In the paradise of Eden all their basic needs were being met. They were close to God who walked and talked with them like a friend. But they rebelled. Maybe they were bored. Clearly they did not believe eating the fruit would kill them.

Clearly they did not understand the consequences of their choices and actions. And our reality is that all too often we continue to be like them, act like them, choose like them. Jesus shows us that we can be different. We can resist temptations.

In the Gospel today, Jesus confronts his personal temptations. The disciples could only have known about these temptations if Jesus had shared his experience and his struggle with them. The desert temptations certainly were not the first time he had been tempted in his thirty years of life. Certainly he continued to be tempted after these three times in the desert. Wasn’t his agony in the Garden of Gethsemane his wrestling with the temptation to run away from the cross? But with the grace of God Jesus does not yield to temptation, does not choose a shortcut to try to make his life easier or just about himself and his pleasure and personal satisfaction. He submits his will to God’s will because he loves God and believes that God loves him. He shares his story to inspire us so that we, too, can resist temptation.
All of us have begun Lent: forty focused days of prayer, fasting and sharing. We are choosing to again try to be more like Jesus. We realize that we will probably make mistakes and may fumble our Lenten resolutions at times but we will not give up. We will pick ourselves up, pick up the cross, and continue on our journey. Lent is about trying to live our lives as well as we can. It is about getting closer to God so we will truly desire and seek what is best. With God’s grace may resist, especially this Lent, whatever tempts us away from being the people we are meant to be. May God be blessed.

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