

1st Sunday of Lent Year C
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Christ the Good Shepherd, ORCC
March 10, 2019

If we went around the room and each person described our relationship with God, I am sure that everyone would have a unique story. A good question for us to ponder this Lenten season is whether or not we are satisfied with where we are in terms of our faith.

Lent is a time for us to enter into a journey of self-discovery that leads to a deeper relationship with our God who loves us without measure. The words of our opening prayer this morning points to the true purpose of Lent:

O God of mercy and compassion, through our observance of Lent, help us to understand the meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection and teach us to reflect it in our lives.

That is what Lent is all about, learning to follow the example of Jesus' death and resurrection give purpose and meaning to our lives.

In our gospel today, we find Jesus, newly baptized and ready to begin his public ministry. Jesus is aware that he has a unique purpose, that he has a difficult journey ahead, but that is where his certainty ends – as it does for many of us. Jesus is unsure of what his ministry, his life, and his call are all about. So he turns to prayer. He takes the time to listen, to reflect upon life's direction, and to pray for strength and guidance.

According to our gospel reading, three things tempted Jesus:

- hunger
- power
- recognition

Those are the same things that also tempt most of us. I am sure these were areas that Jesus struggled with throughout his lifetime, where he was tempted to compromise his ministry by taking the easy route. Yet Jesus was able to rise above his temptations because he was keenly aware of the importance of having a relationship with God; the importance of prayer. Jesus took the time to pray and reflect, to spend quality time with the Almighty.

So when Jesus went off into the desert, the temptations were real, and as we all know from personal experience, sometimes sin is hard to resist. But Jesus knew

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that the solution to life's problems was not going to be solved the easy way. Jesus knew deep down that his calling was not to be a superstar, but to be a servant. His ministry was not about wearing a crown of gold in triumph, but rather, he was to wear a crown of thorns and carry a cross to his death.

This Lenten season is a time for us to follow the example of Jesus and to spend time in a spiritual desert by fasting, praying, and doing good works. It's a time for us repent and to prepare our hearts and minds to welcome the Risen Lord. When God stirs our hearts, may we find the strength and courage to cry out "Here I am Lord, what do you want of me?"

My challenge to you during this Lenten season is to do something positive to nourish your faith. Try doing something special for God that will strengthen your prayer life. By spending time in prayer, like Jesus, we too can transform our lives. As I mentioned on Ash Wednesday, to repent is to turn around, to turn away from the things that tempt us to take the easy route in life.

When Jesus spent time alone in the desert, his faith was strengthened, he found the courage to overcome temptation and to continue moving forward with purpose and conviction. Spend five or fifteen minutes, or an hour if you can, in prayer every day. Make room for God in your busy lives. The closer we move to God, the stronger our faith becomes, which in turn helps move us further outside the reaches of temptation. That is the foundation of repentance and from there we find the strength to fast and to do good works.

In our second reading, we heard the words of St. Paul: "Those who believe in him will have no cause for shame...for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." My friends, salvation is already ours. Jesus paid the price for us; he accepted the cross so that we didn't have to carry it ourselves. The only thing our God asks of us is to Love God, Love one another, and to love ourselves. In so doing, our lives will be worthy of our calling.

As we approach this altar to be nourished by the Body and Blood of Christ, ask Jesus to give you the strength and the courage to avoid the easy path and truly allow the Holy Spirit to guide our thoughts and actions so that we can become more loving and faithful companions of Jesus not only to the cross, but also to the joy of the resurrection.

Amen