

## **A Lenten 'No'**

1st Sunday in Lent (Year c)

March 10, 2019

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We live in a permissive culture. In some sense, this is a welcoming sign for those who may have grown up in a strict environment where there was a lot of discipline and repression. Finding personal freedom and independence is like a breath of fresh air. We are finally free to do whatever we think is best for us. On the other hand, a permissive culture is not an altogether healthy culture. We have largely lost the ability to say 'no' and to mean 'no.' This is unfortunate because there are indeed things that should be met with a no and a no should be respected once it is uttered.

In our Gospel today from *Luke*, we come across a Jesus who can say no. In fact, he says it three times. The first time is when satan asks him to turn stones into bread. He was extremely hungry after days of no food, so it makes sense. Yet, Jesus says no because "one does not live on bread alone." The second time is when satan offers Jesus the power and glory of the world if only he would worship the evil one. To this, Jesus says no, for "you shall worship the Lord your God and God alone shall you serve." The third time, satan asks Jesus to throw himself off the temple so that the angels would catch him, 'lest he dash his foot against a stone.' To this, Jesus says no, for "you shall not put the Lord your God to the test."

The season of Lent, which started this past Wednesday, is a time where we, like Jesus in the desert, practice saying no. We say no to our own comfort and to temptation. It is a time when we recognize that even though everything is possible, not everything should be permissible.

Perhaps one of the strongest examples of this today is the violation of other human beings. Whether it is the misconduct against women by

famous people in Hollywood, the buying and selling of people in human trafficking, the abuse of immigrant children in detention centers or of minors in the Catholic Church, we have reached the point where many have lost their sense of morality. I am not talking about committing a few sins and learning from our mistakes. I am talking about creating a whole environment of immorality through a much longer history of permissiveness, something that we all have contributed to in some way.

Without each one of us seriously practicing saying no on a more consistent basis, our society will continue to keep going further and further down dead-end roads. We will continue to lack direction, intention, and purpose.

*Lent is a time where we practice saying no so that we can move society in new directions.*

What new roads do you want God to take you down during these next 40 days of Lent?

May we not see the structures and disciplines of Lent as repressing our freedom, but as redirecting it towards something more healthy and wholesome. Over the next 40 days, may we practice saying no, for whenever our 'no' means something, then so too will our 'yes.'