

1<sup>st</sup> Lent A 2011  
Deacon Pat Hall

[Genesis 2:7-9; 3:1-7; Romans 5:12-19; Matthew 4:1-11](#)

*Homilies are vehicles for breaking open the Word of God. First read the Sunday readings at <http://www.usccb.org/nab/031311.shtml>*

So...how has Lent been treating you? It's been a bit of a challenge for me. On Ash Wednesday, I was dutifully honoring my fast obligations. We were up late that night. At around 11:45 PM my son asked me if Ash Wednesday was over at midnight. With a paternal smile I said "yes" knowing that what he meant was ... was "fasting" over. And then, noticing my hunger too, I thought I could take advantage of the minute hand in 15 minutes to satiate myself.

And then last Friday morning, I was running a bit behind schedule. I had to be at the Diocesan Pastoral Center for their monthly morning staff mass with Bishop Bradley. Now that sounds like a wonderful churchy, Lenty thing to do, but as I was about to rush out the door I popped the fridge to see what I could grab to eat on the run and there was that fried chicken from the night before. I was  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the way to downtown and around  $\frac{3}{4}$  through my munching when I first started wondering what species of fish would one place the chicken family.

So, I'm not doing Lent so well. My problem is that I was "doing" Lent. Lent is not about me doing. It is about Jesus. It is about Jesus wanting me, wanting us and we wanting Jesus back. It is about wanting Jesus in all the ways he makes himself present: in the everlasting, in the here and now; where he sits at his Father's right hand and where he sits next to you.

Lent is the period where we take time to examine what is getting in the way of our relationship with Jesus. Our fasting, praying and almsgiving are about us cooperating with Jesus as he removes the obstructions between us.

Today we hear of the three temptations of Christ. Jesus had just recently been baptized and heard God's announcement that "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." (Mt 3:17) Jesus went into the desert to contemplate on that very revelation of who he was. And then the devil questions his identify, "If you are the Son of God..." and then tempts him with food for his emptiness, protection from any injury and the security that comes from being in power. If only Jesus would align with Satan, Jesus could have it all.

Turn on the TV. Aren't we offered daily, incessantly the same lies? Our culture tells us that if we win the lotto we can have everything that Hollywood stars, professional athletes and Wall Street financiers have:

satiation of our hungers, protection from all harms and the power to manage it all. But yet, for all their grand promises they forget to tell you one thing: all of that dies. Death comes to all things some time in the future and injury comes daily to all whom we ignore on the way to satiation, security and power.

Jesus had taken 40 days to steep in the truth that his father shared with him. He was ready when Satan came. Jesus knew what was of life and what was of death. Jesus knew with whom to place his loyalty. Jesus knew the source of life and how to be truly alive now...a life that reaches into eternity.

The secret to real life is no secret. It is being in relationship with the Holy Trinity, in accepting the grace being showered upon us, and in finding God as he resides in us and in the others whom he gave us.

As the secret is no secret, Satan has no power to convince us otherwise. But he does have the power to distract us, to tempt us with gilded promises that ultimately end in death. Satan doesn't want us to think about his offers too long. We might elect to pray over those choices and then he's sunk. Most often those temptations come with a "buy now, limited time only, only for a select few" offer. If you are trying to discern whether or not a certain choice is a reasonable option or a temptation, check to see if there is a time limit.

Another way to discern what is of God's abundant blessings or of the Devil's temptations is to see how the choice translates to something that can never die.

Thinks of the joys that you have shared with family and friends. What about those joys will ever die? What about them can you take with you to heaven?

What about the guilty pleasures you seized? Have you already experienced some of the injury or hurt that were their natural consequence? Were relationships damaged? What about them can you take with you into forever?

I want to give you some time to contemplate on what in your life is alive and will last forever. Who has been at the center of your deepest joys? What are your heartfelt deepest desires? Think about those whom you want to experience deeply now and forever.

I will give you around ½ minute of silence to recall those memories. Right now you really only want to spend time with your timeless treasures.

Get comfortable, adjust your seating and breathe deeply. What are your timeless treasures?

[silence for ½ minute]

As you come back to this place, you have the right to feel that you are eternal.

However, we do experience temptations. These are the things that threaten your eternal treasures. During this time of Lent, we are called to examine what we allow to get in the way of our relationship with God and others. Fasting, prayer and almsgiving are ways we allow God to eliminate these obstructions.

I am going to give you a ½ minute of silence for you to examine what are the obstructions you allow. When you identify one say a little prayer, “Jesus, remove this, gently please” and then move on to the next obstruction. Offer it up with your little prayer and move on to the next and so forth.

What obstructions do you allow?

[silence for ½ minute]

As we come alert to this place, let us pray:

Lord Jesus. We love you. We love those whom you have given to us. Give us the grace to love the stranger. Give us the grace to love our enemy. Give us the grace to live fully and forever. We can do none of this by ourselves yet as we come to your table you give us your very self. With you and in you all things are possible.

In your name, with the Spirit and to the Father—Amen.