

1st Sunday Lent- B

[GENESIS 9:8-15](#); [1 PETER 3:18-22](#); [MARK 1:12-15](#)

Homilies are vehicles for breaking open the Word of God. First read the Sunday readings at <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/021818.cfm>



The Spirit drove Jesus out into the desert and he remained in the desert for forty days, tempted by Satan. He was among the wild beasts, and the angels ministered to him.

This is the account as recorded by Mark.

Matthew and Luke, record this event in much lengthier detail.

They both go on to chronicle the temptations Jesus endured:

- Satan tempted Jesus to turn stone into bread.
- He took Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple and dared him to jump and
- then he offered Jesus all the kingdoms of the world if Jesus would only adore Satan.

But today we have Mark's account.

And it seems as if there is a big hole in the story.

Mark makes no mention of the individual temptations.

I wonder if maybe God is trying to tell us something in that hole, in that space.

Maybe that space is where **you and I can put our temptation stories, our wilderness stories**, where we can complete the Gospel story.

This is the season when we are called to prepare ourselves for the paschal mystery through prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

But, here I am preaching to the choir.

As I look out there, I see folks who pray and give and celebrate the sacraments year round.

So what's the difference for now, for this season of Lent?

Throughout the year we strive to establish a practice of devotion and goodness.

We have settled into *our routine*.

Lent is our opportunity to change that routine, to take on a different rhythm, to shake up our lives a bit.

Sometimes our lives need to be shaken up a bit so that the Lord can get in edgewise.

Pray this Lent.

Well you have been praying.

It has been good prayer.

I am not asking you to abandon your good prayer routine of these past months.

But, when is the last time you remember hearing God?

What did he say to you?

Well of course we can't hear God's voice the way we hear each other's.

This kind of hearing takes...listening.

Listening is more demanding than talking.

Listening demands time.

During Lent, can we find that holy piece of time when we allow God to speak to us?

Can you find a prayer place without distraction or interruption?

There are many prayer styles that lend themselves to listening.

I recommend Lectio Divina, holy reading.

Find a passage of Scripture that catches your attention.

Read it.

Sit and contemplate with it.

Listen to the quiet voice of God.

React to it and offer it up in prayer.

Then just spend some quiet minutes with God, not doing, not reacting, just steeping in the Spirit of God.

Fast this Lent. How will you approach fasting?

I expect that we all will participate in the Church's days of fasting and abstinence, together, as a people approaching Good Friday.

It is through this practice of fasting that has developed the tradition of giving something up for Lent.

How will you allow fasting to turn your heart and soul, a *metanoia* towards God?

I offer an explanation of fasting by Fr. Thomas Ryan.

Fasting as a religious act increases our sensibility to that mystery always and everywhere present to us ... It is an invitation to awareness, a call to compassion for the needy, a cry of distress and a song of joy. It is a discipline of self-restraint, a ritual of purification, and a sanctuary for

offerings of atonement. It is a wellspring for the spiritually dry, a compass for the spiritually lost and inner nourishment for the spiritually hungry.”¹

Give alms this Lent.

Well, you folks give year round.

I am constantly humbled by your generosity.

When I came here six years ago, as I analyzed our budget, it looked like we would be broke in two years.

Well that “going broke date” passed by four years ago.

This parish continues to thrive and is a profound Gospel witness to our neighbors... thanks to your generosity of time and resources.

There is no lack of need out there.

We have all experienced those soliciting calls and mailings from really deserving charities.

I used to refuse, telling the solicitor that I have my chosen charities for which I focus my contributions.

You see that way I can say no to the beggar and yet feel like I am still a generous boy.

Well, I’ve started to say “yes” more often, sending a nominal amount that I can afford even if it adds up to multiple charities.

That may be a bit better.

I theorize that with hundreds of people like me, there might be a total contribution that would be substantially helpful.

Yet when I observe Jesus’ example of charity and service, I see that he gives of himself in his service.

There is a relationship after being touched by His love.

If I could give like that, I could enter into relationships that would last forever.

We imitate Jesus in giving to each other.

It is in almsgiving that we connect with the One who has given us all.

These Lenten disciplines have the power to open us to God’s graces.

When temptations come, we will be able to resist with God’s help.

When was the last time you were tempted?

I’m not talking about that midnight snack, but that good ol’ Jesus-being-tempted-in-the-wilderness stuff.

The truth is I may not be really aware of my last big temptation.
My routine may have left me a little **numb**.
I might have called a truce with my temptations, a kind of spiritual co-
existence.
Don't bother me too much and I won't have to address you too much.

C.S. Lewis in The Screwtape Letters addressed this.
I've shared this story here before, but it speaks deeply to my own sorry
inclination.

For those of you who are unfamiliar, these fictional letters are from the
diabolical character, Screwtape, a commander in Satan's legion, to his rookie
tempter nephew, Wormwood.
C.S. Lewis, with tongue in cheek, tries to illuminate God's goodness through
the impaired eyes of the evil one.
As I read part of one of these letters, remember that when I read a reference
to the "Enemy" that is really Screwtape referring to our Blessed Father in
Heaven.

In this letter Uncle Screwtape is writing to Wormwood about his nephew's
newest target, a man referred to as the "patient", who has recently embraced
Christianity.
Wormwood has not given up trying to devour the man's soul for Satan.
In fact on the heels of the patient's newly found Christianity, Wormwood has
introduced some very exciting, if naughty, people into the patient's life.
Screwtape writes:

My dear Wormwood,
Obviously you are making excellent progress. My only fear is lest in
attempting to hurry the patient you awaken him to a sense of his real
position. For you and I, who see that position as it really is, must never
forget how totally different it ought to appear to him. We know that we
have introduced a change of direction in his course which is already
carrying him out of his orbit around the Enemy; but he must be made to
imagine that all the choices which have effected this change of course are
trivial and revocable. He must not be allowed to suspect that he is now,
however slowly, heading right away from the sun on a line which will
carry him into the cold and dark of utmost space.

For this reason I am almost glad to hear that he is still a churchgoer and a communicant. I know there are dangers in this; but anything is better than he should realize the break he has made with the first months of his Christian life. As long as he retains externally the habits of a Christian he can still be made to think of himself as one who has adopted a few new friends and amusements but whose spiritual state is much the same as it was six weeks ago. And while he thinks that, we do not have to contend with the explicit repentance of a definite, fully recognized sin, but only with his vague, though uneasy, feeling that he hasn't been doing very well lately.

This dim uneasiness needs careful handling. If it gets too strong it may wake him up and spoil the whole game. ²

Well, let's wake up.

Let's shake that dim uneasiness of ours and confront what separates us from knowing God more wholly and of serving each other more selflessly.

Where is it that I can go, where I can confront my temptations and sins clearly?

The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation leaves no room for the likes of Screwtape and Wormwood.

Our confessional is a consecrated place, a place where evil is banned, where I am filled with God's grace, just like I am filled with his presence and grace every time I come to his altar.

So listen, choir, this Lent isn't so much about you not being good enough, it is about you finding ways to allow the one who **is** goodness into the very fabric of your being.

Can you shake it up a bit?

Can you allow him into the spaces?

Let your life complete the Gospel story.

1. The Sacred Art of Fasting, Thomas Ryan CSP, pp x-xi
2. The Screwtape Letters, C.S. Lewis, chapter 12, pp 1-2