

Homily for the First Sunday of Lent

2/21/21

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Mark 1:12-15

Today's Gospel presents to us the narration of Jesus's temptations in the desert. The Gospel of Mark in few verses presents to us this scene. We read: *"The Spirit drove Jesus out into the desert, and he remained in the desert for forty days, tempted by Satan. He was among wild beasts, and the angels ministered to him"*.

A few days ago the Church presented us the reading of the book the Deuteronomy where the high priest was declaring the person unclean (as in the case of the leper) and was sending it away in the deserted places, away from the camp and the tent of the covenant. When the Apostles on seeing the blind man from birth asked our Lord: *"Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"* *"Neither this man nor his parents sinned,"* said Jesus, *"but this happened so that the works of God might be manifested in him"*. In the Hebrew Bible, the term is used thrice in Leviticus 16, where two male goats were to be sacrificed to Yahweh and one of the two was selected by lot and sent into the wilderness אֲזַזֵּל, "for Azazel". The goat was bearing on itself the sins and translations of the people... and nonetheless it was chosen...

In the book of the Revelation our Lord places a clear distinction between the sheep and the goats, which is an image

of the righteous and the sinners. Yet, in today's Gospel Our Lord himself is going to the desert, the place where the cursed goat was sent by a high priest so that his glory may be manifested. Our Lord as the merciful High Priest in today's Gospel is showing to us that before the Last Judgment, He wishes to go in the deserted places searching for what was lost calling back sinners, publicans, and the outcasts of the society to repentance. That's why we often find the crowd that follow Jesus in the deserted places. The crowd of sinners rejected by the society whom the Lord called to repentance. Yet, Jesus knowing that the Temple will be in few years destroyed called sinners to Himself – the Temple of the living God. He told us: Come to me all who are burdened and oppressed, and I will give you rest.

I would like to bring to your attention the meditation of the Pope Emeritus Benedict 16 concerning this passage. We read: *"In this short account of the temptation (Mk 1:13), Mark brings into relief the parallel between Adam and Jesus, stressing how Jesus "suffer through" the human drama. The desert – the opposite image of the garden - becomes the place of reconciliation and healing. Wild beasts are the most concrete threat that the rebellion of the creation and the power of death posed to man. But there they become man's friends, as they once were in paradise. Peace is restored, the peace that Isaiah proclaims for the days of the Messiah: "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid" (Is11:6). Once sin has been overcome and man's harmony with*

God restored, creation in reconciled, too. Creation turn asunder by strife, once more becomes the dwelling place of peace, as Paul expresses it when he speaks of the graining of the creation, which “wait with eager longing for the revelation of the sons of God”.

Our Lord, as our Creator, is going to reconcile his creation to Himself. That’s why often in the Bible a man that lives in sin and follows his passion is called an animal... Today our Lord is showing us that He came in order to bring back to His fold a strayed sheep, the lost and suffering humanity. He wishes to go into deserted place looking all that was lost, sent “for Azazel”, in order to bring back home every sinner. Yet He himself wishes to suffer first in order to become our merciful high priest.

Let us ask in this Holy Mass through the intercession of Our Lady for the grace to answer generously to God’s call for our conversation, so that we may bring Our Lord to all men who “wait with eager longing for the revelation of the sons of God”.