

Homily Notes for Sunday March 5 2017 First Sunday of Lent A

Readings: Gen 2:7-9, 3:1-7; Rom 5:12-19; Mt 4:1-11

Why is it important for us to use Lent to examine ourselves and rid ourselves of sins?

How can this help us reduce stress on our marriages, our children and ourselves?

1. Summary: Lent is a period of forty days preceding Easter, traditionally of fasting and penance, designed to purify our lives of sin and to grow in self-control which helps us to avoid sin and to be more effective as disciples of Jesus. The readings today help us to understand “what went wrong after creation” and to appreciate God’s gift of grace through Jesus Christ to help us overcome the effects of the “original sin” and how we must respond to our situation as sinners in the struggle for salvation.

2. First, a story which illustrates how attractive and innocent sin can first appear and how it can grow to threaten our lives.

Temptation to keep large carnivores as pets: Antoine Yates lived in New York City and for some inexplicable reason brought home a 2-month-old tiger cub and later an alligator. It’s not clear where he found them. But they were with him for two years — in his apartment. What previously was a little tiger cub, became a 500 pound Bengal tiger monstrosity. It was inevitable. The police got a call about a “dog” bite and when they got to the 19-story public housing apartment building, they discovered Yates in the lobby with injuries to his right arm and leg. Someone alerted them of the possibility of a “wild animal” at his apartment. A fourth-floor resident complained that urine had seeped through her ceiling from Yates’ apartment. When they arrived, the police peered through a hole and saw the huge cat prowling around in the apartment. To make a long story short, it took a contingent of officers at the door, and some rappelling from the roof to use a dart gun to bring this animal under control. When they entered the apartment, they found the big cat lying atop some newspapers. The alligator was nearby. Both animals were relocated to shelters. As for Yates, he missed his tiger and alligator, demonstrating that it’s possible to be in love with the very things that can kill you. That is what happens to those who entertain temptations in the form of evil thoughts and desires, evil habits and addictions.

What can this story teach us about ourselves and sin?

3. Lent is a time to deal with our nature as it really is and look at temptations, sin and the consequences. Are we allowing any spiritual wild animals (sins) hang around in our lives until they grow up and harm and destroy?

4. The first reading from the book of Genesis describes the “Original Sin”. This is the story of the first sin, shown by the eating of the forbidden fruit. It tells us that Adam and Eve were given the possibility of making a choice. In Genesis, we witness how temptation to evil led Adam and Eve to an act of faithlessness and sin. In contrast, today’s Gospel from St. Matthew shows us how Jesus Christ conquered temptation by relying on faith in God’s Word and authority.

5. The second reading (Rom 5:12-19): St. Paul describes how the disobedience of Adam who fell to Satan’s Original Temptation brought him, and us, death and a broken relationship with God. Paul reminds us of the social consequences of sin. Sin is never a private affair, affecting only myself. When we sin, all our relationships are affected: our relationship with our inner self, our family relationships, our relationship with our God and our relationship with nature and the world in which we live. Paul says that just as sin and death came through Adam, salvation and life come through Christ. Christ regained for us the right relationship with God that Paul calls justification, which comes to us as undeserved grace.

6. Today’s Gospel: teaches us how the “desert experience” of fasting, praying, and soul-strengthening was a kind of spiritual “training camp” for Jesus which enabled him to confront his temptations successfully and then to preach the Good News of salvation. That it was spiritually necessary is shown by the fact that Jesus was led into the wilderness by the Spirit. We, too, during Lent, should see ourselves going into desert for a time of testing, examination of conscience and renovation of our lives. We should confront our temptations and conquer them as Jesus did, by fasting, prayer and the Word of God. We should renew our lives by true repentance and live the Good News of God’s love, mercy and forgiveness.

7. Note the three kinds of temptation Jesus faced:

1. Food – this represents all of our bodily desires, desires for food, drink, sex, good feelings, etc. Response from Scripture, “One does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.”
2. Pride and Vanity – This temptation was to do a dramatic miracle that would show his power. Response again from Scripture: “You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.”
3. Power – This was an offer from the Devil, who is prince (ruler) of this world for power and control over much territory and many people if Jesus would serve the Devil. Response again from Scripture: “The Lord, your God, shall you worship and him alone shall you serve.”

8. Question: Do we know the details of God’s Word well enough to protect us from all temptation and to alert us to present spiritual dangers? Perhaps one of our opportunities this Lent should be learning necessary truth from the Bible and the Church, especially about marriage, family and raising our children.

9. How can the story of the tiger cub and the alligator teach us about sin?

1. Small, innocent, cuddly things can grow to become life-threatening.
2. One can still love and be attracted to things that have grown to be very destructive.
3. It may take the help of others (police, fire, priests and counsellors) to get rid of the thing.
4. It may take being hurt and a long struggle to get rid of the thing.
5. We can still love and be attracted to that which we know can destroy us.
6. Two ways: Turn to God and be saved or continue with the sin and be condemned to death and hell.

10. The issue of stress and anxiety, in our families and with our children. Currently Dr. James Dobson in his radio program, “Family Talk”, has raised issues about how the intensity of life and anxiety is having a most destructive effect our children. He attributes the rise in ADD, ADHD, some autism and other problems found in our youth to the stress our children encounter, especially in the family, but also in school and our society.

Some statistics: Every day in the USA:

3,000 children experience their parents’ divorce;	1,629 children are put into an adult prison;
388 children run away from home;	1512 children drop out of school; and
7742 teens become sexually active.	

Think of the anxiety, stress, and guilt this provokes in these children! The challenging Good News for all these problems is in our Catholic faith! God has given us all we need! But it may be a struggle and may be difficult! Dr. Dobson is now publicly promoting that mothers need to stay at home in order to care for their children adequately. Can we families make it on one income? I remind us that being close to God, knowing his guidance in His Word, and living our lives as His intentional disciples provides solutions for all the above listed problems!

11. It seems to me that our work this Lent and this year as individuals and as a Parish is to work on firming up our marriages and learning how to care better for our children. We are not going to solve this this morning, but I invite all families to turn to the Lord to reflect on how we can function better as a family and how we can stop running around frantically. This is why our Lenten disciplines are so important.

12. Reflection: Can we be delivered from evil and anxiety if we do not resist and flee from sin? Let us go back to our Mass and the Eucharist. Can we expect to have peace in our personal lives, in our family’s life, or in our society if we are caught up in sins? This is why we plead with God to “keep us free from sin and safe from all distress” in the Communion ritual.

13. Let us recall the words in the Communion Liturgy of the Mass:

Right after the Lord’s Prayer. “Deliver us Lord, we pray, from every evil, graciously grant peace in our days, that, by the help of your mercy we may be always free from sin and safe from all distress, as we await the blessed hope and the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

14. So in conclusion, as we begin this Lent, can you identify any spiritual cuddly little tiger cubs or cute little baby crocodiles that may have taken up residence in your life, especially your family’s life? Are you allowing them to hang around in your family while they grow up and can cause damage and death? How can we as a parish community be helpful? How can we help to strengthen and order family life? How can we help to cope with stress and the things that cause anxiety and stress in our lifestyles, especially with our children?