

Commentary to the 1st Sunday of Lent - C -



When we consider the 40 days of Lent, we focus on preparing for Easter. That is one reason for Lent, but only one. We are also preparing ourselves for the full sharing in Jesus' Resurrected Life that will take place when we pass from this life to the next. We are preparing for eternal life. That is why during Lent we need to consider our personal battles against evil. As human beings, we will always be confronted with the temptation to do wrong. As long as we have human bodies we are going to be tempted to seek joy in places where the Lord is not found. If you get to the end of the day and can honestly say, "I had no temptations of any kind today," you should take your pulse. You are probably dead. Jesus himself was tempted to accept the pleasures of the world rather than remain united to the Father.

One of the problems we have, though, is that we live in a society that gives little weight to temptation. Instead, it suggests that whatever we do is acceptable as long as, supposedly, no one gets hurt. This is the lie that claims that there is such a thing as a victimless crime.

Many of us buy into an additional lie of society that it is psychologically unhealthy to deny yourself. This is not true. When we fall for this psycho babel temptation, we are really saying that doing evil is a good thing. We are falling for the initial temptation of the devil in Genesis. “Do it and don’t worry about God. It’ll be good for you.” Taken to its logical conclusion, this is also saying that there should be no morality of any kind or level in society. Everybody should do whatever they want whenever they want to do it. People should not have to live together in a way that respects each other and their Creator. Of course, we could decide that others should follow the laws of morality, as long as we are not held to the same moral principals. In which case we condemn ourselves to hypocrisy.

Society also tries to convince us that human beings are too weak to combat temptation. This leads some parents to insult their children by expecting them to behave like animals when they become teenagers, or leave home for college. These are the parents who provide alcohol for the Teen’s parties or give their children the opportunity for sexual immorality, or put their daughters on birth control because, they argue, “They are going to have sex anyway.” These parents are basically saying that their children cannot resist temptation, so they provide the temptation for them. They don’t consider the fact that when parents facilitate sin, they carry a deeper guilt than their children for the sin and have more for which they will need to answer to God. I often tell the young people that they are not animals, that they have the dignity of being sons and daughters of God. They have the right to demand that others respect their dignity.

There is a final fallacy I’d like to mention although there are many others that society foists on us. This fallacy we are tempted to believe is the concept that these are modern times with a whole new set of moral guidelines. Every single society in the history of man has made this claim. When the Greeks invaded Palestine, many Jews joined their pagan orgies, etc because the Greeks were supposedly enlightened and had ushered in a new era. The same thing happened every time there was any change in society. In our times even some of our senior citizens, who should be examples of morality for their families, fall for this lie, giving financial reasons for living together outside of marriage instead of holding onto the Way of the Lord and avoiding relationships that cannot lead to marriage.

Right and wrong has not changed. Sin exists. And we human beings will always be tempted to sin.

We have the power to resist sin, to defeat the temptation. Think back to the story of Cain and Abel in

Genesis 4. Cain was a tiller of fields and Abel a keeper of flocks. They were called upon to make an offering to God. Genesis does not say why or how, but God showed he was pleased with Abel's offering but not with Cain's. Perhaps Abel was generous and faithful in following God, but Cain was just going through the motions. Cain was upset. He was jealous. He had enough of his brother. He convinced himself that his world would be better if Abel were not in it. It is at that point that we come upon the most significant passage in the story. God speaks to Cain. He knew what was on Cain's mind. He knew he was going to kill his brother. The Lord said, "sin is a demon lurking at the door. His focus is towards you, yet you can be his master." Cain was tempted, but he did not have to kill his brother. He could control himself and resist the temptation. The devil didn't make him do it. In the same way, the devil, whether he is within us or outside of us, cannot make us sin. We can resist temptation. Every one of us has various temptations in our lives. And every one of us has the ability to beat them off. There is no reason for any of us to buy into the devil's lies. None of us are incapable of resisting temptation.

But we have to want to resist it. We have to be determined to do the Will of God. Jesus was determined to do the will of the Father. It is great, wonderful, that so many people approach the sacrament of penance during Lent. Along with the forgiveness of sin, and perhaps even as important, the sacrament of penance strengthens our resolution to avoid sin.

How determined are we to live the Life of the Lord? Do we really want to fight off temptation? Do we really want to be healed? These are the deep questions we ask ourselves at the beginning of Lent. We pray for strength during Lent, strength not just to fight off evil, but to want to fight it off.

Sin has lost its power, death has lost its sting, from the grave you've risen, victoriously. Into the marvelous light we are running, out of darkness, out of shame, by the cross you are the truth, you are the light you are the way.

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