

Beloved in Christ, today is the first Sunday of Lent. The season of Lent is a preparation for the Easter celebration. It is a time to imitate Jesus spending forty days in the desert. Jesus fasted in the desert, and overcame the devil's temptations (Lk.4:1-2). Lent is an invitation for us to take the courageous step of "**going into the desert**" and not hiding from what lies hidden deep within us. It is a period where we ought to allow our sins and weaknesses to come to the surface so that we can deal with them and allow them to be healed by the grace of God. It is only when we admit our sins that we will try to overcome them. If we remain in denial, we miss receiving the grace of God to heal us and to renew us and to make us whole. During Lent, we say no to the devil's temptations to continue committing sin; instead, we trust in our heavenly Father like Jesus in the desert.

Let us examine how Jesus responds to the devil's temptations, as we see today. You must understand that even though Jesus is by nature God, he has humbled himself and has become one like us. In his humanity, he experienced the full force of temptation. In the first temptation, Satan asks Jesus to turn stones into bread. Playing on the hunger and weakness caused by Jesus' fasting, the Devil tries to get Jesus to despair and to complain against God, as the Chosen people did when they spent their time out in the desert. He also hopes that Jesus might subvert His own identity as Son of God by inducing Jesus to use His power to turn stones into bread. Jesus resists this temptation and rebukes the devil saying that man does not live on bread alone, but on every Word that comes from the mouth of God (Lk4:4 and Mt.4:4).

In the second temptation, the devil said to Jesus "I shall give to you all this power and glory... if you worship me" and Jesus replied you shall worship the Lord your God, and Him alone shall you serve (Lk.4:8). Jesus did not even want the glory that belonged to God, although, he has the right to be treated as God (Phi.2:6-7). Finally, the devil makes another attack on Christ's Messianic identity. He says to Jesus, "If you really are the Son of God then jump off this parapet and thereby prove it once and for all. God will save you if you are who you claim to be." Again, Jesus responded, you shall not put the Lord, your God to the test (Lk.4:12). Our Lord's temptations sum up every kind of temptation man can experience. According to St. Thomas Aquinas ... for the causes of temptations are the causes of desires; namely: lust of the flesh, desire for glory and eagerness for power (Summa Theologiae, 3, 41,4 Ad 4).

During Lent and, in fact, all the days of our life, we say no to the devil's temptations to continue committing sin, and instead we trust in our heavenly Father like Jesus in the desert. The words of Jesus can be our words this Lent, "Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." (Luke 4:4) Since the early centuries, the Church has suggested three things that we undertake during Lent - **prayer, fasting and almsgiving**. It is for this reason that the Gospel text for Ash Wednesday every year is Jesus' advice on prayer, fasting and almsgiving (Matt 6:1-6, 16-18). Fasting is a penance the Church encourages us to undertake during Lent. From the spiritual point of view, fasting symbolizes our dependence on God. It expresses the fact that we really are trying to put God first in our life. The Bible tells us that **fasting from food must go together with fasting from sin** "violence and fasting from oppressing people" (Isa 58:3-12).

In conclusion, Brothers and Sisters, as followers of Christ, many trials and troubles may beset us. Each and every day, people will "test our patience", boundaries, love and so on and so forth. We will find ourselves tested, tempted to anger and impatience, by members of our own family, our friends, our classmates and our co-workers. We must follow the good examples of Jesus. In response to the Tempter, Jesus turned to His Father in heaven. Satan was offering Jesus **an easy, spectacular, superficial and astounding way of life**. Jesus' response was to remain faithful to His Father. Let us remember that Satan may hide his real agenda of our desire of the flesh and power, behind our human weaknesses. "**Oh, everybody's doing it, so I can also do it**" is the sentiment that Satan puts deep within us all. Let us use the golden opportunity of Lent to review our past and make useful resolutions for our future and pray all the time to overcome devil's tricks. Amen!