

Sunday, 21st Feb 2010

1st Sunday of Lent

Reading 1: Dt 26:4-10

Responsorial Psalm Ps 91:1-2,10-15

Reading 2: Rom 10:8-13

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Gospel : Lk 4:1-13

Scripture: *Luke 4:1-13*

1 And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan, and was led by the Spirit 2 for forty days in the wilderness, tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing in those days; and when they were ended, he was hungry. 3 The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." 4 And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.'" 5 And the devil took him up, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, 6 and said to him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory; for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. 7 If you, then, will worship me, it shall all be yours." 8 And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.'" 9 And he took him to Jerusalem, and set him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here; 10 for it is written, 'He will give his angels charge of you, to guard you,' 11 and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'" 12 And Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'" 13 And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Meditation: What motivated Jesus to spend 40 days and nights of solitude, prayer and fasting in the Judean wilderness? This desert landscape was largely uninhabitable and was full of dangers for anyone who dared to venture in it for long. Danger from scorching heat by day and extreme cold at night, danger from wild animals and scorpions, plus the deprivation of food and the scarcity of water. Why did Jesus choose such a barren, lonely place for an intense and long period of sustained prayer and fasting? Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell us in their gospel accounts that Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness. Mark states it most emphatically: "The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness" (Mark 1:12). What compelled Jesus to seek solitude, away from his family and friends, for such a lengthy period? Was it simply a test to prepare him for his mission? Or did Satan want to lure him into a trap? The word *tempt* in English usually means to entice someone to do what is wrong or forbidden. The scriptural word used here also means *test* in the sense of proving and purifying someone to see if they are ready for the task at hand. We test flight pilots to see that they are fit to fly under all conditions, including times of adverse turbulence and poor visibility. On some occasions God tested Abraham to prove his faith and to strengthen his hope in God's promises. Abraham obeyed willingly even when God asked him to sacrifice Isaac, the son of promise. When the Israelites were in Egypt for more than 400 years, they did not forget God. They kept God's word and remembered his promise to bring them freedom from their enemies.

Jesus went to the desert without food or shelter. Adam and Eve had everything they needed in the Garden of Paradise. But they ate of the forbidden fruit out of disobedience because they trusted in themselves rather than in God. They were cast out of Paradise and driven into the wilderness. Jesus freely enters the wilderness in order to regain Paradise for those who lost it. Jesus refuses food to show his dependence on the bread of heaven, the Word of God, that would sustain him not only in his physical hunger, but in his hour of temptation as well. When Satan tempts Jesus to turn stones into bread, Jesus replies with the words of scripture, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (quote from Deuteronomy 8:3; see also Matthew 4:4).

Where did Jesus find the strength to survive the desert's harsh conditions and the tempter's seduction? He fed on God's word and found strength in doing his Father's will. Satan will surely tempt us and he will try his best to get us to choose our will over God's will. If he can't make us renounce our faith or sin mortally, he will then try to get us to make choices that will lead us, little by little, away from what God wants for us. Jesus was tempted like us and he overcame sin not by his own human effort but by the grace and strength which his Father gave to him. He had to renounce his will for the will of his Father. He succeeded because he wanted to please his Father and he trusted that his Father would give him the strength to overcome the obstacles that stood in the way. Luke says that Jesus was "full of the Holy Spirit" (Luke 4:1). When tempted by the devil Jesus did not try to fight his adversary on his own human strength. He relied on the power which the Spirit gave him. Jesus came to overthrow the evil one who held us captive to sin and fear of death (Hebrews 2:14). His obedience to his Father's will and his willingness to embrace the cross reversed the curse of Adam's disobedience. His victory over sin and death won for us not only pardon for our sins but adoption as sons and daughters of God.

How can we overcome sin and oppression in our personal lives? The Lord Jesus gives us his Holy Spirit to help us in our weakness (Romans 8:26) and to be our guide and consoler in temptation and testing (1 Corinthians 10:13). The Lord gives grace to the humble who acknowledge their dependence on him (James 4:6) and he helps us to stand against the attacks of our enemy, Satan, who seeks to destroy us (1 Peter 5:8-10; Ephesians 6:10-18). The Lord Jesus is ever ready to pour out his Spirit upon us that we may have the strength and courage we need to resist sin and to reject the lies and deceits of Satan. God wants us to "fight the good fight of the faith" (1 Timothy 6:12) with the power and strength which comes from the Holy Spirit. Do you rely on the Lord for your strength and help?

Questions for Community Faith Sharing:

Are you always tempted to commit certain sins?

Do you give in to these sins easily or embrace God's Will faithfully?

How do you overcome sins or temptation in your daily life?

"Lord Jesus, your word is life and joy for me. Fill me with your Holy Spirit that I may have the strength and courage to embrace your will in all things and to renounce whatever is contrary to it."