

Beginning Our Lenten Journey

Deut. 26: 4-10; Ps. 91; Rom. 10: 8-13; Lk. 4: 1-13

We have just entered the Season of Lent; a time of sacrifice as we follow the path of Jesus that culminated in His Passion, Death, and Resurrection. Perhaps many of us are already feeling weighed down by the prospect of the prayer, fasting and almsgiving that go along with Lent. Maybe the sacrifices seem to be too much and we are tempted to give it all up.

In the Gospel, we read that Jesus was also tempted. In His human nature, shortly after His baptism, Jesus spent forty days in the desert being tempted by the devil. He was tempted by material things, by pride, and by avarice. He could have given in to the devil's offers but instead He resisted and gave us an insight into the ministry that the Father had in store for Him; a way of humiliation instead of royal triumph.

Jesus' battle with Satan mirrors the struggles with temptation that we face moment-by-moment throughout the course of our daily lives. All of us can think of temptations that bring us to our knees. Each of us probably has our own special temptation; one that we find particularly difficult to resist. The devil knows how to reach us all.

The situation seems pretty bleak. We are surrounded by temptations to sin and we seem to be powerless to overcome them. St. Augustine reflected on the temptations that we face and commented as follows:

Our pilgrimage on earth cannot be exempt from trial. We progress by means of trial. No one knows himself except through trial, or receives a crown except after victory, or strives except against an enemy or temptations.

St. Augustine explained that our whole life, from birth until death, is filled with temptations to sin. We cannot avoid them. So he said that, rather than trying to avoid temptations, we should embrace them as trials for our own progress. We should look on the temptations as opportunities to test ourselves, to overcome them, and to gain the prize of victory.

Most of us have played checkers or chess or a similar board game. We know that we can arrange the table and chairs, and set up the board with all the pieces, but unless someone agrees to play with us, there will be no 'thrill of victory or agony of defeat'. We need the opponent to test us. Without him/her, we won't have the opportunity to learn something about ourselves, our opponents, and the game. Without the opponent, we will not improve.

We should think of this Lenten period as more than just a time of sacrifice. If we focus on the privation associated with this season, we are missing the point. We need to see this time as an opportunity for conversion, to recognize our powerlessness in the face of temptations, and to place ourselves totally in the hands of God.

Just as Jesus never weakened in His trust in His Father during His time of trial, we too must have faith that God is with us during this time, calling us to conversion, and sustaining us while we are in our desert; a desert that is not a location but rather an experience.

As we continue our Lenten journey, let us allow God to enter into us to help us conquer temptation and to prepare us for the Good News of the resurrection that awaits us at Easter.