

Lectio Divina of the First Sunday of Lent A -2023

Opening Prayer: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Dear Heavenly Father, we are now in the holy season of Lent. We realize that these are the days of salvation and spring in our prayer life. We know who we are that in many ways we have offended Your infinite majesty. We know that our sin destroys Your life in us. Help us now in our feeble attempts to make up for our past failures. Bless our efforts with the rich blessing of Your grace. Make us realize ever more our need of penance and of mortification. Help us to see, in our ordinary difficulties and duties, in the trials and temptations of every day, the best opportunity of making up for past failures and sins. You know that we are set in the midst of so many dangers, that by reason of the frailty of our nature we cannot always stand upright. Grant us such strength and protection, to support us in all danger and carry us through all temptations. We make this prayer through our Lord. Amen.

First Reading: A Reading from the book of Genesis 2:7-9; 3:1-7 The LORD God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being. Then the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and placed there the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground the LORD God made various trees grow that were delightful to look at and good for food, with the tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Now the serpent was the most cunning of all the animals that the LORD God had made. The serpent asked the woman, "Did God really tell you not to eat from any of the trees in the garden?" The woman answered the serpent: "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; it is only about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God said, 'You shall not eat it or even touch it, lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman: "You certainly will not die! No, God knows well that the moment you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods who know what is good and what is evil." The woman saw that the tree was good for food, pleasing to the eyes, and desirable for gaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate it; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves. (The word of the Lord/Thanks be to God)

Commentary: The first reading describes the story of the first sin. The serpent tempted Eve by getting her to doubt God's goodness. He implied that God was strict and selfish for not wanting Eve to share his knowledge of good and evil. Satan made Eve forget all that God had given her and instead, focus on the one thing she could not have. We fall into trouble when we dwell on the few things we don't have rather than on the countless things God has given us.

Responsorial Psalm 51 Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.

Have mercy on me, O God, in your goodness;
in the greatness of your compassion wipe out my offense.
Thoroughly wash me from my guilt
and of my sin cleanse me.

R. Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.

For I acknowledge my offense,
and my sin is before me always:
"Against you only have I sinned,
and done what is evil in your sight."

R. Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.

A clean heart create for me, O God,
and a steadfast spirit renew within me.
Cast me not out from your presence,
and your Holy Spirit take not from me.

R. Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.

Give me back the joy of your salvation,
and a willing spirit sustain in me.
O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth shall proclaim your praise.

R. Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.

Second Reading: A reading from letter of St. Paul to the Romans 5:12-19 Brothers and sisters: Through one man sin entered the world, and through sin, death, and thus death came to all men, inasmuch as all sinned— for up to the time of the law, sin was in the world, though sin is not accounted when there is no law. But death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who did not sin after the pattern of the trespass of Adam, who is the type of the one who was to come. But the gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one, the many died, how much more did the grace of God and the gracious gift of the one man Jesus Christ overflow for the many. And the gift is not like the result of the one who sinned. For after one sin there was the judgment that brought condemnation; but the gift, after many transgressions, brought acquittal. For if, by the transgression of the one, death came to reign through that one, how much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of justification come to reign in life through the one Jesus Christ. In conclusion, just as through one transgression condemnation came upon all, so, through one righteous act, acquittal and life came to all. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so, through the obedience of the one, the many will be made righteous. (The word of the Lord/Thanks be to God)

Commentary: how can we declared guilty for something Adam and Eve did thousands of years ago? Many feel it is not for God to judge us because of Adam's sin. Yet each of us confirms our solidarity with Adam by our sins each day. We are made of the same stuff and are prone to rebel and we are judged for the sins we commit. We were all born into Adam's physical family - the family line that leads to certain death. All of us have reaped the results of Adam's sin. We have inherited his guilt, a sinful nature and God's punishment. But christ offers us the opportunity to be born into eternal life by leading a sinless life.

Gospel Reading: A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew 4:1-11

At that time Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was hungry. The tempter approached and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become loaves of bread." He said in reply, "It is written: One does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes forth from the mouth of God." Then the devil took him to the holy city, and made him stand on the parapet of the temple, and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written: He will command his angels concerning you and with their hands they will support you, lest you dash your foot against a stone." Jesus answered him, "Again it is written, You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test." Then the devil took him up to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in their magnificence, and he said to him, "All these I shall give to you, if you will prostrate yourself and worship me." At this, Jesus said to him, "Get away, Satan! It is written: The Lord, your God, shall you worship and him alone shall you serve." Then the devil left him and, behold, angels came and ministered to him. (The gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ/ Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ)

Meditation: Each year, the first Sunday in Lent, invites us to meditate on the temptation of our Lord Jesus Christ. The temptation of Jesus is given to remind us of facing temptation without sinning and getting strength from him through prayer and worship because he went through the same experience. He was led by the Spirit of God into the desert to be tempted so that every creature in heaven, on earth, or under the earth might know that Jesus Christ is the conqueror. He exposed Satan and his tactics and defeated Satan. Like he became victorious over the devil, we are invited to have victory over the tempter whichever form he may appear. During his temptation, the angels ministered to him meaning Jesus was comforted by the angels who had a significant role in his earthly life - Announcing Jesus' birth to Blessed Mother, Reassuring Joseph, Naming Jesus, Announcing Jesus' birth to the shepherds, Protecting Jesus by sending his family to Egypt and Ministering to Jesus in Gethsemane. **Catechism of the Catholic Church:** Every one of us experiences temptation no matter how spiritual we are. The Catechism of the Catholic Church #538 defines temptation as an attraction, either from outside oneself or from within, to act contrary to right reason and the commandments of God.

What is temptation? Temptation is not a sin. It is simply an enticement and work of the devil to drag us to hell. It becomes a sin only we give ourselves into temptation. We tend to think that temptation is making us weak and commit sin. On the other hand, it is meant to make us good, enabling us to conquer sin. The English word 'temptation' is coming from the Latin word temptare which means 'to feel or try out'. Therefore the word 'temptation' in itself does not connote anything bad.

Why temptation? God allows temptations in our life not to punish us but to shine us and glow us in our life. God has given us free will. As people of intellect and reason, we have the will and ability to overcome the temptation. God does not tempt us beyond our ability (1 Cor 10:13).

What is the source of temptation? God is not the source of temptation. St. James in his letter says very clearly "When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed". (James 1:13-14). The sources of temptation according to John is the world and the flesh. He says in 1 John 2;16 "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the

lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world” The church’s traditional teaching is that there are seven most basic sinful drives. They are namely Pride, Greed, Lust, Anger, Gluttony, Envy, and Sloth. These serve as deep sources of temptation. We should not allow these sinful drives to enslave us.

Pope Francis’ interpretation: Few years back, Pope Francis in his interview to a catholic television TV2000 made a theological point. He suggests a change in our Lord’s Prayer. According to him, the phrase “Lead us not into temptation” in the Lord’s prayer, creates confusion or it is not a good translation. He argues that God would not lead anybody toward sin. He suggests a better translation like “do not let us fall into temptation” It is we who fall. It is not God who throws us into temptation and then sees how we fell.

Cultural ambient for temptations: Our physical body is genetically programmed to yield to temptations. Besides that, we are surrounded by temptations everywhere. Electronic devices, Secular philosophies, Addiction to Consumerism and Commercialism, Inordinate desire for more money by any means and so on. Thus temptations are everywhere and they are sure to come in our life. If Jesus had temptation, who are we? As humans, irrespective of age, we are all vulnerable to sinful pleasures, easy money and other vices. It is during those weak moments, we need to confront and conquer the temptations as Jesus did, using the spiritual weapons he employed: what are they? Prayer, Penance and the Word of God. When we use these powerful weapons, nothing can easily seduce us to sin. We read in 1 Jn 4:4 “The One who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world”. Let us therefore confront tempting moments with personal prayer, meditative reading of the word of God and participating in the Holy Mass and making a good confession.

Tempting and Testing? Sometimes we hear people saying God is tempting me too much. It is not true. God will never tempt us because He is all good. He will only test us. What is the difference between testing and tempting? Testing is for rewarding someone while Tempting is for defeating someone. God tested the faith of Abraham and He tested the integrity of Job. Jesus tested the confidence of Peter. These people won the test and we know their rewards beyond their imagination. Tests are painful and inevitable but if we handle them with his strength, they become moments of glory in His time although painful at present. Sufferings are all test from God to know whether we are strong in our faith and integrity like Abraham and Job. In short God tests us to help us mature in our faith, serve as an example for others and receive spiritual rewards beyond our imagination later on. Let us therefore confront tempting moments with personal prayer, meditative reading of the word of God and participating in the Holy Mass and making a good confession. May this holy season of Lent make us holy by resisting all sorts of temptations with the help of our prayer, fasting and charity.

Concluding Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, Thank you for giving us this season of Lent, a time of prayer, reflection and conversion. For our sake, you fasted forty days and allowed yourself to be tempted. Protect us so that we may not be led astray by any temptation. Since we do not live by bread alone, nourish our souls with the heavenly food of your Word; Help us to overcome our weakness and temptations with your strength coming from our prayer life. Let everything we do in this holy season come from you and be inspired by you. Help us to remember that nothing is important in our life unless it glorifies you in some way (Hail Mary...Glory..Blessing)