

March 13, 2011

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT (A)

... I imagine that most of us don't relish Lent. But, we feel it's necessary – like medicine.

1) Lent is Like Spring

1. Lent an old word that refers to the lengthening of the daylight hours, and therefore to springtime.

2. Lent is a spiritual springtime: a time to prepare the ground of our hearts, to clear away the obstacles to spiritual growth, so the seed of the Word of God can take root in us.

3. The sun's life-giving rays bring growth. Lent is a time to open up to the rays of the Holy Spirit who will warm our hearts.

2) God's Love

1. Lent is about God's love.

2. He says: "return to me with all your heart".

3. God wants our whole heart. He loves us with his whole heart, like a parent who wants to do everything he can for his children.

3) Temptation

1. Today's Gospel tells us that Jesus was tempted in the wilderness by Satan. Lent is a time to strengthen ourselves against temptation, as Jesus was strengthened by his prayer and fasting over forty days.

2. Remember that Jesus experienced his temptations as man, like we would.

3. We can apply the temptations of Jesus to ourselves as coming from other individuals, our own cravings or the devil. But we can also see the temptations presented to Jesus as coming to us in our present culture, the society around us: consumerism, individualism and power seeking. The devil has his hand in all of these.

4. In the First Reading we hear about the basic temptation that has afflicted the human race from the beginning: to be our own god, to be "like God".

The Original Sin has implanted an inclination in the human race to act independently of God.

5. What's your greatest temptation? How are you strengthening yourself against it? (One fellow said that he had no trouble with temptations – he simply gave in to them.)

4) The First Temptation: Materialism and Consumerism

1. The first temptation of Jesus was "to turn stones into bread". This is the temptation of the pervading materialism that entices us to seek satisfaction, bodily pleasure and fulfillment in possessing or consuming earthly goods, without regard to how our consumption deadens our spiritual life or affects others.

2. Even when reduced to extreme hunger, Jesus puts God and his direction of our lives first. He says: "no one lives on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God".

3. Application: Are the things we keep buying really necessary? Do we need an elaborate home entertainment centre, or the latest home appliance or furnishing, or a new car when the present one is in good condition? Are we gluttons in how much we eat and drink and indulge in entertainment or in seeking sexual pleasure contrary to its proper use? How do we feel when we see so many people struggling to obtain the necessities of life? Are we willing to give the money we spend on luxuries to the poor instead and to contribute generously to Share Lent for Development and Peace to help the poor countries? We are obliged to use our surplus income to help the poor.

5) Second Temptation: Individualism

1. Jesus' second temptation was like getting him to say: "Look at me, I can jump off a high building! – a temptation to be a superman and win the acclaim of the people.
2. Quoting Scripture, Jesus replies: "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."
3. Testing God means acting without God's direction, presuming that God will go along with you, no matter what you do, not caring whether what we do is in accord with God's will.
4. The individualism that permeates our society tempts us to do our own thing, to go it alone, to seek our own goals without concern for the good of others. We see a striking example of this, in the risk taking financial transactions carried out by Wall Street bankers without sufficient security, that played a key part in bringing about our current recession.
5. Individualists do not take part in parish life or efforts for the good of the community; they disregard the situation of the poor because they are all wrapped up in themselves.
6. So we can ask: Are we trying to live in solidarity with others, in mutual support? Are we working with others to help all the members of our groups to develop in all the ways they can and need to, whether in our family, workplace, parish, school, or community?

6) The Third Temptation: Power Seeking

1. In Jesus' third temptation, Satan says: "I will give you all the kingdoms of the world if you worship me". This is a temptation to get authority and power in our world but on the devil's terms.
2. It's a temptation to secularism: to put God out of our lives and seek our own ends.
3. People make power and control over others their "gods". Huge corporations and money interests seek control over the economy, influence government to suit their interests, and exploit others.
4. Jesus is tempted to an easy way to win over the world without suffering, but by sacrificing his allegiance to God, and to his principles. All of us can be tempted to overlook God and our Christian principles in order to achieve our goals.
5. Quoting Scripture, Jesus replies: "Worship the Lord your God and serve only him."
6. Sinful structures, systems and practices have been built up in our society to advance selfish, power seeking goals in economic and political life.
7. We may feel compelled to go along with this. For instance, our prevailing business practice emphasizes profit, even to the exclusion or neglect of how this affects others. All businesses are caught up in this current and can find it hard to uphold the welfare of employees, with fair prices for customers and good quality and service.
8. To avoid expense and increase profit, environmental damage often occurs.
9. A sense of justice for the poor is lacking. Our current welfare system does not provide enough to live on and degrades those who receive social assistance.
10. We can ask: Are we entrenched in our own little kingdoms and unwilling to change? Do we seek to dominate others, control them, even in our own families? Do we go along with wrong practices and systems, for fear of losing money or meeting with opposition or damage if we don't? Do we try to join forces with others, with social justice movements and groups, to overcome unjust systems and practices?

7) Our Need of Scripture

1. Jesus responds to each of Satan's temptations with the words of Scripture, the Scripture he knows so well and which guides his thinking.

2. We need Scripture to be strong against temptation. Pope Paul said: “Spiritual growth is inconceivable without renewed listening to the Word of God. This must become a life giving encounter which questions, directs and shapes our lives.”

Our Mass

Now as we enter into our Eucharistic Prayer of Offering, we enter into the life giving power of the Death and Resurrection of Christ, to make us one with him and with each other, with the power to give of ourselves to others as he gives himself for us, the power to overcome our self- seeking or our fear of opposition or abuse by others when we act justly.

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NOTE TO USERS OF “HOMILY NOTES”:

Thank you for using the Homily Notes. We hope that they are helpful in preaching applications of the Sunday Readings to Catholic Social Teaching when the Readings indicate these. The Sunday homily is the primary way to educate our people in the Social Teaching of the Church of which so many have little awareness. If you have comments or suggestions about these Notes as to their content or format, would you please let us know by emailing lcum@rideau.net