

Homily – 1st Sunday of Lent C

There are many ways Jesus teaches us to overcome sin. This First Sunday of Lent, we want to focus on the priority of the Word of God against temptation, sin and the devil. From our Gospel passage ([Luke 4:1-13](#)), we see the importance of the knowledge of God's Word in conquering our trials. What a glaring reminder of St. Paul's words of exhortation!

Finally, be strong in the Lord Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers Therefore ... take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (Eph 6:10-13, 17 RSV).

In the above, St. Paul portrayed our struggle against temptation in a military language. It is a "spiritual warfare against the terror of the enemy, the devil". This understanding is clearly missing in the mentality of our age. With a naïve liberal mindset, the need for heroic witness is fast disappearing. We have a wonderful opportunity in our parish to Study and Grow in the Word of God – the arsenal to conquer the devil. It is not too late to sign up. It is truly life changing.

Jesus underlines why this study is indispensable: "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:31-32). In the days of Adam and Eve, they were very privileged to get the word of God firsthand from God himself. However, they did not trust in it, as they should have done; they were not convinced, so it did not take root in them. That left a loophole for the enemy to strike and prevail. The Devil came, saw and conquered them. Hence in the Parable of the Sower, Jesus warned against the danger of superficial Christianity, saying, "When any one hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in his heart; this is what was sown along the path" (Matt 13:19). Are you like this?

Our Gospel passage shows that Jesus engaged in a retreat, a desert experience, to prepare himself for his ministry. Having fasted and prayed for forty days, "he was hungry". What was he hungry for? What are we hungry for? What are our deepest yearnings or longings? Are they essentially material or spiritual? If they are essential material, it leaves a loophole for the devil. Some commentaries claim that Jesus' hunger made him physically wearied and emotionally stressed; hence, the devil tried to take advantage of him. Beloved, that Jesus was physically hungry does not imply that he was emotionally

stressed. He was in full control, armed with confidence in the Word of God.

What, then, was Christ hungry for? He was hungry for souls; hungry to fulfill the Father's work; hungry to bring sinners back into repentance. This is similar to his yearning on the Cross when he said, "I thirst" (John 19:28). What was he thirsty for? Certainly, not for water or wine, he was thirsty for souls. Hence, the devil came to distract him with a craving for material and physical needs: "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." But Jesus would not be distracted. Standing on the Word of God, he replied, "It is written, *One does not live on bread alone*" (Deut 8: 3). He lived up to his words: "Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of man will give to you" (John 6:27).

Next, the devil tried to dissuade him with another material preoccupation, the inordinate appetite or hunger for power, a prestige position of glory and influence. Here, the devil predictably made false claims and empty promises, saying, "I shall give to you all this power and glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I may give it to whomever I wish. All this will be yours, if you worship me." That all power and glory was given to the devil? By whom? What a terrible lie! Jesus, standing on the Word of God, replied, "It is written: *You shall worship the Lord, your God, and him alone shall you serve*" (Deut 6: 16). Hence, we must *never to seek to prosper through occult worship and superstitious rituals of sorcerers, soothsayers or diviners who promise us "false prosperity"*. *At every celebration of baptisms, the Church leads us to renounce the "Satan... all his works and his empty promises... [and] the glamour of evil."*

Lastly, and this is very tricky: the devil tried to manipulate Jesus' spiritual hunger to live by the Word of God, saying, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written: *He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you, and: With their hands they will support you, lest you dash your foot against a stone.*" Jesus triumphed against the devil's manipulation of God's word, once again, standing on the Word of God in the proper way, saying it is written, "*You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.*" This last temptation shows that we must avoid falling for "liberal" attempts to manipulate of the Word of God on many fundamental issues of faith and morals today. We must, in the words of St. Paul, "no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles" (Eph 4:14). We must be convinced of our Catholic Faith, for the Scripture says "the church of the living God [is] the pillar and bulwark of the truth" (1Tim 3:15). "From the snares of the devil, Lord Jesus, deliver us!"