

Who's Really In Charge?
March 6, 2022, First Sunday of Lent
Gospel of Luke 4:1-13
Fr. Brad

In our first reading, Moses speaks to the people. It is a reading from Deuteronomy, accepted as being the Book that summarized the first five books of the Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy itself. These first five books are commonly known as the Pentateuch.

Here, Moses summarizes and articulates a new narrative for the people to identify themselves with; that is, as oppressed slaves of Egypt whom God has freed in order to nurture them with new life in a new land. Here he instructs them about always remembering what God has done for them and that they must offer the first fruits of their productive land to God in thanksgiving. So from our first reading, we ask ourselves, do we remember with gratitude what God has done for us? and if so, how do we express it?

No matter how hard done by we are tempted to feel in this world, we are privileged, especially when we think of what is going on in other parts of the world right now.

Paul's instruction in the second reading is to encourage belief with the heart so as to be justified and then to confess with the lips so as to be saved. He urges all people to call on the name of the same Lord of all.

Do we believe with our whole heart that our Lord came into the world to show us a way that actually leads to life and is beyond what the ways of this world offer? Too often we fall back into what the world offers us for our comfort and security. It's a fact of life and we must not get lost in it.

We are all familiar with the Gospel of Jesus' temptation in the desert. Jesus voluntarily opened himself up to his vulnerability as a human person. He experienced nakedness before God which left him hungry and vulnerable before God and the devil.

Like the desert, Lent, if we allow it, can represent a taking away of the securities like food, enjoyments, distractions, and protections of ordinary life and **strips us bare** both before God and the devil. As an aside, I cannot help but think of the seniors and vulnerable people who face many of these Lenten realities all year round as they face their limited capacities and isolation - all exacerbated by Covid. It is a reality of life in this world.

When you think of temptation and the consequences of falling into it, think also of the emptiness and the feeling of being duped afterward. One might think that if we recognize we are about to be tempted, perhaps we will be in a better position to resist that temptation.

However, sadly we may well know ahead of time we are being duped but in our addiction, we are powerless to avert the temptation. Our bodies, and or minds, simply need that fix. Or at least that notion is firmly embedded as a pattern.

Many an addict or alcoholic needed to come to a place of dramatic realization in order that they would finally admit they were completely helpless in digging themselves out of the hole they found themselves by themselves. They had to come to admit to themselves finally that their lives were unmanageable without assistance and that their

lives had been spiralling out of control. EVERYONE OF US IS AN ADDICT of one sort or another. In fact, we can tap into the wisdom of the AA 12 Step Program to aid us in carrying out our spiritual inventory as we progress through Lent.

- i) **Can I admit I am powerless** over the effects of our separation from God? ...and that my life is in some ways still unmanageable?
- ii) It is **a power greater than myself that can restore** me to sanity and a manageable life.

Do we know when we are being tempted, when the ways of the world and our own cravings do not jive with the ways of God? What are we hungry for and how do we go about relieving our hunger? What my mind and heart are preoccupied with informs me of what I worship and serve.

Am I recognizing temptation for what it is and am I finding ways to resist it by consciously avoiding situations where I might be tempted?

Am I recognizing the desire for praise and admiration within myself and that part of me that wants to be seen as better than everyone else? Or at least, better than I am?

Does my need to be right get in the way of waiting for God? Am I quick to blame others?

Can I combat the desire for power and self-interest in a world that is reeling in it?

Am I afraid to appear weak, vulnerable, and dependent before others?

(Having worldly power and authority is like being ruler of a sandcastle, ruling over a monument that quickly blows away to nothing with the coming tides and winds).

Am I prepared to live with the unanswerable questions of life and wait on God as Jesus did by not putting God to the test, or do I buy into the answers or quick fixes that the world all too readily provides for us?

Remember, Jesus demonstrates for us firsthand how to follow the Father, the One who better knows what we truly need at any given time - - the One who knows the proper way of bringing it about if it is the right thing, both for God's glory and our betterment. That is what humbling ourselves before God is all about.

The season of Lent reminds us that we all, through the course of our lives need to do inner work within ourselves - - work that can only be done alone, possibly bringing to the surface sadness, grief, and heaviness that sometimes we need to enter into voluntarily. We normally choose to avoid the stillness of the desert, the loneliness, the loss of familiar support. We try to escape from or repress the truth of the fragility of life in this skin and how helpless we truly are.

Lent can remind us that **in our suffering**, when those things we *think* we need in order to live are denied us, **we do not have to be desperate**.

If we observe other cultures, we see the same dynamic at work, sitting in ashes, going off alone to work on our inner lives and face our demons. The essence of Lent is a human phenomenon, not just a Catholic Tradition. May we all recognize and take advantage of this Lenten opportunity.