

The Difference

First Sunday of Lent – Luke 4: 1-13

As we open this first week of Lent, we hear in sacred scripture of Jesus' temptations. Every human being is tempted by the devil to make choices between good and evil, including Jesus. The difference is that Jesus remains faithful to his mission to do God's will. So how might Jesus' faithful fidelity help us on our Lenten Journey?

It depends on what one is hoping to accomplish, what difference one hopes to make in one's life. Lent is not a weight loss program or a fitness challenge. Lent is not a way to fill up our punch card with the number of prayers we say or Masses we attend. Lent is especially not about what we give up.

Rather, Lent is about making a difference in our relationship with God and others. Lent is a time for spiritual reflection, prayer, fasting, abstinence and alms giving. These practices are only good if they are set in the right order of helping us change our lives, ordered toward God's will and the good of other people.

“Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert for forty days, to be tempted by the devil.” The very spirit that descended upon Jesus at his baptism is the very spirit that has led him into the desert to be tempted. This does not make sense unless we consider that Jesus must first do battle with Satan before he moves forward toward his ultimate battle with the cross at Jerusalem. The cross, Jesus' sacrificial death, will be the ultimate test of fidelity.

Coming out of the desert, Jesus had to be starving. Jesus had to have a sense of loneliness and longing for human contact and recognition. These are the very temptations that Satan places before the Lord. Satan suggests that Jesus has the power to turn stones into bread. Why not tap into that power? Satan suggests that Jesus give worship to him. Why not give in to the power and glory promised by the devil? Finally, Jesus is tempted to test God's fidelity. **“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.”**

The difference and the opportunity for us is that Jesus provides us a model of faithfulness and truth that can only come from God. If we ground ourselves in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we can survive the most difficult temptations. In our Lenten practices of fasting, prayer and self-denial, let us become more Christ-like in our lives, giving over to God's will, changing our selfish ways toward the way of Jesus' sacrificial and loving Mission. This is what will make a difference in us and in the world.

Happy Lent!


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