

A Time of Renewal

First Week of Lent – March 5, 2017- Matthew 4: 1-11

Lent is the season of renewal. It is a time when we are asked by Mother Church to take an assessment of our lives. We are asked to consider, most specifically, how our relationship with God is going. It is not a diet plan or a self-improvement program. Rather, Lent is one of the liturgical seasons of the year when we are called to conversion, to change direction back to God with holy habits of living life.

So what might these holy habits be? We can look to the gospel on this first week of Lent to reflect on that burning question. To awaken spiritually, we need to acknowledge that sin is a reality in the world and we are part of the sinfulness that plagues the human race. Not even Jesus was free from temptation. The difference was Jesus' faithfulness to the reign of God which we are called to imitate.

“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.*”

Jesus' response gives us our first holy habit. We are called to live lives of prayer. When life looks fragile and we have nothing, do we trust God to help us? Jesus' scriptural reference from (Deut 8: 3) calls us to seek God in scripture and specifically in prayer during this holy season of Lent.

“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.*”

Here the devil has tried to use scripture against Jesus. Jesus responds with a simple but holy practice. “You shall not put the Lord, your God to the test.” The discipline of fasting/abstinence during the Lenten season puts some of our deepest wants in check. It allows us to align our lives toward God as the Creator of all things and the very reason we have food, shelter, protection and life. To test God is to ask God to prove to us that God must side with our will. Fasting and abstinence strips us of vanity and allows us to reflect on the basic needs that God provides us every day. It opens us up to the Divine will.

The final test this week sees the devil tempt Jesus with all the wonders and riches of the world. “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.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Get away, Satan! It is written: *The Lord, your God, shall you worship and him alone shall you serve.*”

The holy practice of alms-giving is to lead us to realize all that God has given us. This practice is a call to worship God and only God in our lives. The practice of giving sacrificially is to wake us up to return to God with all our hearts.

Prayer, fasting and alms-giving are not disciplines just for Lent. They are to renew us to seek God every day. This time of renewal and holy practices allows us to be opened and to break free of sinful habits and to recognize and acknowledge the Divine Presence in our midst.

Blessings!


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