

First Sunday in Lent  
February 18, 2018  
Fr. Rick Lorenz

## Reflection

Lent is a time of spiritual preparation for Easter. Through our experience of fasting, almsgiving and prayer, our hearts are rent; opened up to receive the graces that advance our salvation. It can be a struggle. We make resolutions but waver in the face of temptation. Maybe we've given up chocolate. But it's a co-worker's birthday, and someone's brought cake. We like them, or at least don't want to be rude by refusing, and God probably wouldn't mind, and it's not like it's a chocolate bar which is REALLY what I meant, and it's just one time; besides it looks pretty good; maybe just one piece...

So here's the question: why does God allow us to feel temptation?

In today's Gospel, we hear that "After Jesus was baptized, the Spirit drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the Angels waited on him." For those who are baptized, Lent unites us to Jesus "in the wilderness forty days." The wilderness stands for the world. It tempts us with apparent pleasures; things which seem good because they contain a good...but can separate us from God because they lack the fullness of good. Like watching an illegally downloaded movie. The picture is fun to watch and lifts our spirit, but the artists receive no compensation. It's a tiny theft that goes unpunished, but still leaves its mark.

Gen 9:8-15  
Ps 25  
1 Pet 3:18-22  
Mk 1:12-15

The "wild beasts" who were with him remind us of our vices. Part of our flesh, stemming from pride, we have thoughts of lust and anger; a desire for what belongs to others; insatiable wants that can leave us empty and slack. If these thoughts take hold, they can pull us along the path towards sin; even if we wrestle against them first, and regret them afterwards.

And Jesus was tempted by Satan. He seduces with lies, and had a disastrous influence on humanity through the fall of Adam; a legacy of wickedness and suffering springing from disobedience to God; a darkening that persists.

Lent unites us with the struggle of Jesus, and also with his victory. Satan tries to compromise his obedience, but Jesus is the New Adam who obeys. He overcomes the devil, the world, and the flesh, and this makes him sympathetic to us. And he went through this struggle for us. "We have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sinning." "Angels waited on him," and we are strengthened by grace.

The baptized repeat this experience of temptation, failure and victory every year during Lent; and every day of their Christian lives. At each moment is another chance to decide, to deepen in commitment, or to depart from what is offered.

The experience of catechumens, who will be baptized at Easter, is even closer to the experience of Jesus. First they receive the Holy Spirit and become children of God, with acclaim from the congregation gathered around; cleansed of sin; a new creation.

Then comes the wilderness.

The applause has faded and the euphoria is gone. Maybe there's mystagogy in the Easter season, but that ends too as summer begins. Weekly catechesis is complete and the group disbands. The stain of original sin is gone, but concupiscence remains. At some point temptation will take hold. So the question stands: "Why does God allow us to feel temptation?"

The answer lies in the second part of the Gospel. "Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news." After temptation comes proclamation.

If we face temptation, we can master it, since God matches temptation with strength and the means to escape it. We rely on him, and come to know it more and more. He helps us when we turn to him in prayer, saying "Lead us not into temptation." This is better understood as, "Do not let us yield to temptation." Help us with virtue, come to our aid with grace. The decision to ask for this help brings us help. Receiving it makes us channels of God's love and mercy.

It flows from him, through us, out to others. And it sticks to us, making us different, because every victory lets us grow. They give us the will to share what we receive. So we proclaim the Gospel by our words and deeds. And in a sympathetic way, with humility.

"He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way." We know the source of goodness and so can better share it with the world. And we're not alone; never alone, but part of the Church. It carries us like the ark through storms beyond count to a tomorrow that is beyond imagining.