

First Sunday of Lent – Year C
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Holy Family Catholic Church
Kirkland, Washington
10 March 2019

Deuteronomy 26:4-10
Psalm 91
Romans 10:8-13
(Matthew 4:4b) Luke 4:1-13

Temptation and Trust in God

So, how's it been going so far? I hope you all are having a good and holy start to Lent! I'm appreciating Lent for how it helps us grow in holiness, but it's been kind of a slow start for me. When I was a kid, I looked forward to Lent, and all the things that made it a special season. Getting ashes on Ash Wednesday. Thinking of something to give up for the season. Special days of fasting and abstaining from meat. It was a special season and a fun challenge.

I remember during my fifth grade year there was a particularly challenging moment that I faced during Lent. My class had won a pizza party as a reward, so that was a pretty big deal for us. However, the party was scheduled for a Friday. During Lent. So, that was disappointing – it meant no pepperoni pizza for me. Cheese pizza only.

But then, I noticed my friend from church, Julie, eating pieces of pepperoni pizza. So, I asked her, "Hey, what's going on? Why are you eating meat? Don't you know it's Friday during Lent?" And she said, "Oh, I asked my mom about it and she gave me permission to trade days. I can eat meat today in exchange for not eating meat tomorrow." Oh, she's clever! Why didn't I think of that?

Now, I don't mean to pick on my friend, Julie. Sounds like she discussed it with her mom and made a thoughtful decision. But this little story highlights something important about our approach to Lent. On the one hand, there are times when it's appropriate to discern the need for an accommodation to our Lenten practices. On the other hand, there are also times when we

are tempted to set aside our Lenten practices, and make God's plan for our growth in holiness fit into our *own* plan. We have to be careful about discerning the difference between the two.¹

As I said, this year has been a bit of a slow start for me in getting into this holy season. I've been feeling kind of flat this week. I hope that's not the case for you but, if it is, you're not alone – I'm right there with you. And in that space of feeling flat or indifferent about Lent – whether we're already feeling it in week one, or if we begin to feel it in the latter weeks of Lent – that's when we might be vulnerable to the temptations that will surely come. Temptations to set aside our Lenten practices. To make little accommodations. To make a program that fits into our own plan. And then we might miss the opportunity that God is giving us to grow in holiness.

The Good News is that these Holy Seasons that God gives us through the Church don't come and go based on our own feelings and attitudes. They are always a gift to us. They are always another opportunity to grow in holiness. And they always seem to come at just the right time.

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I've never done this before in a homily in my couple years as a priest. But I've decided to tell a joke in today's homily. Don't worry, I'm not trying to encroach on Fr. Steve's territory. He's still the king of jokes. But I came across a joke this week that lightened my mood, so maybe it will lighten yours, as well. I've modified it a bit, but some of you might recognize it – maybe even Fr. Steve has already told it before. So here goes:

There was a young man who moved to a new town. Every Saturday afternoon he went to the neighborhood ice cream shop and order three single ice cream cones, all for himself. After a few weeks of this, the ice cream scooper was curious, "Why do you always order three single ice cream cones, all for yourself? Why not just get a triple-scoop cone?"

The young man replied, "Well, when I was a boy, every Saturday afternoon, my two brothers and I used to go get ice cream cones together. Now

that I've moved away from home and am missing my brothers, I decided to keep the tradition going, as a way to keep feeling connected to them."

A few months later, the young man made his regular visit to the ice cream shop, but this time he only ordered two cones. The ice cream scooper got worried, "Only two cones? Did something happen to one of your brothers?" The young man replied, "No, both of my brothers are doing fine. I'm still going to eat these two cones on their behalf. But, I can't have the third cone today for myself, because I gave up ice cream for Lent."

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We begin Lent each year on the first two Sundays by hearing about the Temptation of Jesus on the First Sunday, and then hearing about the Transfiguration of Jesus on the Second Sunday. And, recall that we have a three-year cycle of Sunday readings: Year A for Matthew; Year B for Mark; and Year C for Luke. So, even though the theme is the same for the first two Sundays each year – Temptation and Transfiguration – there are different angles we get from the three evangelists.

This year – Year C – we're getting the perspective of Luke. So, what's the angle that Luke wants us to see on Jesus' experience of Temptation? In order to understand Luke's perspective, we'll start by briefly looking at Mark's and Matthew's perspective.

First, the Gospel of Mark. The account of the Temptation is very brief, just two verses:

The Spirit drove Jesus out into the desert,
and he remained in the desert for forty days,
tempted by Satan.²

That's it. No details about what happened, other than the length of time and location.

However, it's in both Matthew and Luke that we hear about the three familiar ways that Satan tempted Jesus. In Matthew, Satan tempted Jesus to:

- 1) Turn stones into bread;
- 2) Throw Himself down from the parapet of the Temple;
- 3) Be given all the kingdoms of the world, if He worshiped Satan.³

Now, in Luke, it's the same three temptations, but the detail for us to take notice of – the angle that Luke takes on it – is found in the order of the three temptations:

- 1) Turn a stone into bread;
- 2) Be given all the kingdoms of the world, if He worshiped Satan;
- 3) Throw Himself down from the parapet of the Temple.⁴

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So, what's going on here? Did Luke just get the order mixed up? No, there's some aspect of the Temptation that Luke wants to emphasize for us. And that the Church wants us to know about to help us in our own battle with temptation that will surely come at us during Lent.

The emphasis that Luke wants us to learn is the importance of *trusting in God*. Maybe that sounds too obvious. Yes, we all know that we are supposed to trust in God. Maybe it's obvious, but it can be *really* hard to do sometimes, can't it?

The First Reading from Deuteronomy demonstrates the difficulty. The Israelites had been wandering through the desert for forty years. Whereas we are at the beginning of our forty-day journey, they were at the *end* of their forty-year journey. And after forty years of *complaining against* and *not trusting* in God to provide for them, Moses had to remind them *one last time* before they entered the Promised Land. He gathered them all around for one last pep talk before he died⁵:

“OK, folks, we're about to enter the Promised Land. God is going to provide everything we need, but let's be careful. Let's not forget what we've been through.

Remember how the Egyptians mistreated us? Don't forget that God heard our cries back then. God led us out of slavery in Egypt.

Remember all the signs and wonders He did for us in setting us free and leading us here? The Plagues; the parting of the Red Sea; the manna, quail, and water in the desert; defeating all our enemies along the way. Even though we kept grumbling and testing God.

Don't forget that God made all this happen for us and now He's fulfilling His Promise to lead us into this land flowing with milk, honey, and all kinds of good things. Don't ever forget that God is the One whom we will always trust!”

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This ancient lesson remains the same for us today. We may not know exactly where these forty days of Lent are leading us. We may not fully understand why not eating pepperoni on Friday matters. We might be tempted to think of creative ways to justify eating that ice cream cone or doing whatever it is we gave up for Lent.

But, it's in that time of temptation that we are given the opportunity to grow in holiness. And the foundation for growing in holiness is *trusting in God*. Trusting that God *is* providing for us and God *is* leading us – even when we don't fully understand it or recognize it.

This is why Luke ordered the temptations the way he did. To place an emphasis on *trusting in God*.⁶ And at the end of His Temptation, Jesus concluded with these important words to be a guide for us this Lent: “You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.”⁷

In other words: “Satan, I don't need to jump from the parapet of the Temple to see if God will catch me. I already know that God has got me. He is with me always, guiding me, protecting me, and even catching me when I happen to fall.”⁸

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Whatever this Lent has in store for us, we may not fully know it yet. With God's help and protection, we do know that we can persevere and keep moving forward. And we know we can *trust in God* – the One who has it already in mind for us.

¹ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* 2847: “The Holy Spirit makes us *discern* between trials, which are necessary for the growth of the inner man, and temptation, which leads to sin and death. We must also discern between being tempted and consenting to temptation. Finally, discernment unmasks the lie of temptation, whose object appears to be good, a ‘delight to the eyes’ and desirable, when in reality it leads to death.”

² Mark 1:12-13

³ Matthew 4:3, 5-6, 8-9

⁴ Luke 4:3, 5-7, 9-11

⁵ See Deuteronomy 26:4-10

⁶ See CCC 2119: “*Tempting God* consists in putting his goodness and almighty power to the test by word or deed. Thus Satan tried to induce Jesus to throw himself down from the Temple and, by this gesture, force God to act. ...

The challenge contained in such tempting of God wounds the respect and trust we owe our Creator and Lord. It always harbors doubt about his love, his providence, and his power.”

⁷ Luke 4:12

⁸ See Psalm 91:1-2, 10-11, 12-13, 14-15