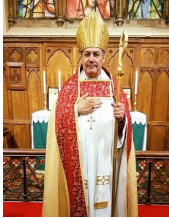




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**MESSAGE FOR LENT 2018**



AS we enter into the holy Season of Lent, we are drawn into the encounter between our Lord and the devil in the Gospel for the First Sunday in Lent. We witness the temptations offered to Jesus by Satan -- the temptation to question the truth of God's Word, the temptation to base one's happiness and security upon the things of this world, and the temptation to reject God's love and care for the false promises and indifference of Satan.

We are told in Scripture that Satan was an archangel by the name of Lucifer, meaning 'bright star'; who rebelled against God, attempted a *coup d'etat* in Heaven, fought against the forces of the Archangel Michael and his heavenly army of angels, was soundly defeated, and summarily cast out of heaven by God into the utter darkness of eternal damnation. And what was Lucifer's sin? Challenging the sovereignty of God; demanding equality with God; believing himself to be better than God. Wanting to determine his own destiny apart from God; wanting to "call the shots" as we would say in modern parlance. Unfortunately, these sins are as old as time, and as current as this very moment.

Being in control, calling all the shots, determining our own way, can seem to be very important – almost our right. Giving up control, handing over our lives to God, walking by faith rather than by sight, can be very risky and rather unsettling. We like to be in control, we like to know what is going to happen. Acknowledging the reality of our life, our situation, and our place in the God's divine plan demands faith, courage, humility, and trust.

When Satan quoted Scripture to Eve in the Garden of Eden, he discovered to great his delight that God's new creation -- made in the very image of God -- could not even recall the basic commandments of her Creator. The devil was then able to sow the seeds of doubt in the minds of our first parents and to lead them down the very path of rebellion and destruction which Satan had himself taken against God before the beginning of time.

As a result of Adam and Eve's willful ignorance and disobedience, sin took root in the soul of humanity; and, like the devil and his apostate angels, our first parents were cast forth from the presence of God, no more to dwell in Eden, that Paradise of utter perfection, peace and plenty which God had prepared out of love for His creation. With Adam and Eve, humanity was cast forth into the harsh reality of a fallen world, with the words of God resounding in their ears: 'Remember, that thou art dust and to dust thou shalt return'.

These are the very words we heard on Ash Wednesday, as we knelt here before the Altar to be marked with ashes, symbol of our contrition and of our acknowledgement of the power of sin in our lives. But as the ashes of contrition for sin are marked with the sign of the Cross – the very sign of hope and redemption – so the words God spoke to Adam and Eve as they were cast out from Paradise were also accompanied by words of hope and redemption. The promise of salvation which would be wrought, in the fullness of time, through the new Adam and the new Eve.

And so we come to Lent. The devil once more makes an appearance, this time to our Lord in the desert. The devil again seeks to tempt and to mislead, to test the Son of Man; and to twist the words of Sacred Scripture. He tempts Jesus; he quotes Scripture to the new Adam, recalling the fall of the first Adam, hoping to trip up the only-begotten One, and so ensnare the Son of God. But as we have revealed to us in the Gospel, this time the responses are neither confused nor in doubt.

The new Adam -- Jesus -- corrects the devil and quotes the Word of God accurately and in the proper context. Where the flesh is tempted and carnal satisfaction is offered by the devil, our Lord responds that humans do not live on bread alone but by every word which proceeds out of the mouth of God. Our life, our very being, is dependent upon God Who uttered the decree of life. The body is more than flesh, and life more than desire. We come from God, we are His very own, soul and body, and it is He alone who nourishes our souls and sustains our bodies.

Where earthly power is offered and the omnipotence of God questioned in the second temptation, Jesus responds that the power and mercy of God are not to be tested nor presumed upon. Unlike the devil and his desire for superiority over God, our Lord does not even presume upon His equality with God, but submits Himself in obedience and utter humility to the will of His Father, even unto death upon the Cross.

In the third temptation, Jesus is shown all the kingdoms of the world, their glory and power, in a moment of time. He is told that all of this will be His if only He will bow His knee to the devil -- if the Son of Man would acknowledge the sovereignty of Satan over the kingship of God. How subtle, for Jesus is already King of kings and Lord of lords -- all creation is already His. He is the Word from Whom all worlds were made, He is the Lord of heaven and earth. Jesus responds and does indeed bow His knee, not to Satan but to God His Father, quoting in turn: "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve." There is no other, there can be no other, than God -- all else is but illusion and deception. Only God has the power to save; only God is sovereign; only God can raise up that which has fallen in sin and death.

The world, the flesh, and the devil: These same temptations come to us all, young and old, sinner and saint, and usually in the most unlikely and seductive guise. Fortunately, God's grace is able to sustain us in our temptations and to prevail against the wiles of Satan. We have only to look to God in faith, to believe in His promises, to be obedient to His commandments, and to trust in His redeeming love. The snares of the devil are always being set, for that is the way of evil; but it is not the way of God.

Our Lord withstood the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil in order to restore the obedience of fallen humanity to the commandments of God. Our Lord offers to each of His disciples the grace to withstand these same temptations; and to offer in the place of sin and death, blessing and life.

The holy Season of Lent is a time for turning away from sin and for turning back to God. It is a time to reflect upon the will of God for our lives, and to recommit ourselves again to Him. St. James bids us: "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God and He will draw nigh to you." (*James 4: 4,5*)

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