

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT; Cycle – B; Feb. 18th 2024
Genesis 9:8-15; 1 Peter 3:18-22; Mark 1:12-15

Dear Sisters & Brothers,

As we know, Adam and Eve, our first parents, were the victims of the first temptation which occurred in the Garden of Eden. The temptation came in the form of greed. Thereafter, the same continues in mankind in different forms. It is rather shocking to see that even Jesus was not spared of the temptations. The synoptic gospels give the temptations of Jesus with great emphasis. In a way, the temptations of Jesus are something comforting for us. The reason is that if Jesus who was also divine became the victim of temptations, how much more we, the weak human beings, are prompt to fall into temptations! Also it is consoling to us for the reason that Jesus, who experienced the temptations and defeated them, will be able to understand our struggle with temptations and help us to overcome them.

Every year on the first Sunday of Lent our attention is drawn to the temptations of Jesus in the desert where he was tempted to use the easiest and popular methods to accomplish the salvific mission. As we know, people of Israel were tempted often in the desert and failed. And Jesus too was led by the Spirit to the desert to be tempted by the devil; but he defeated the temptations. The Evangelists, Matthew and Luke give us a very detailed account of the three specific temptations of Jesus; whereas, as we heard, Mark gives us only a very brief description of it. Mark simply says, **“He remained in the desert for forty days, tempted by Satan. He was among wild beasts, and the angels ministered to him.”**

The three Evangelists had specific and immediate reason to bring the attention of the early Christians to the temptations of Jesus. Remember, when Mark, the first one who started writing his gospel around A.D. 70, Emperor Nero had already opened wide range of persecution against Christians in Rome. By that time Peter was martyred and the Christians were wildly hunted all over. Every day Christians were burnt alive and many were thrown before the wild beasts in the Amphitheatre for the entertainments of the Romans. Many have accepted martyrdom very courageously, but at the same time many left faith and many were tempted to leave. So the Evangelists wished to boost the spirit and courage of the faithful by *showing that their Master Jesus also was tempted by Satan/devil who wanted to dissipate him from the mission and also in the desert Jesus too had the threat from the wild beasts*. The early Christians could identify themselves with Jesus in every respect as he also suffered from the Romans and met with a tragic death.

It is certain that Jesus defeated the designs of Satan heroically and remained faithful to the will of his Father. But the temptations of Jesus were not over in the desert itself. They followed him up to Calvary in different forms. Even in the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus was tempted to escape the crucifixion. But he never yielded to any temptation.

Though we don't have the same situation of the early Christians, our lives too are surrounded by all sorts of temptations, perhaps worse than that of the early Christians. *The modern life which is over dominated by science and technology, secularism, materialism and consumerism, our Christian faith and values are hanging on a thin thread which can break any moment.* Thousands of people leave their faith daily. Sometimes the pressure is so much that people don't know what to do and where to go for help. Here comes the life and temptation of Jesus for our aid. He too had to undergo all sorts of temptations to dissipate from his mission, against the Will of his Father and yet he has not sinned once. So he is the high priest who can sympathize with us and help us in our struggles.

In the letter to the Hebrews the author reveals a very consoling truth, **“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weakness, but one was tempted in every way that we are, yet never sinned” (Heb. 4:15).** Very often we rely on our power to beat the temptations. But no human help and our efforts alone will enable us to overcome the temptations. The solution is nobody, but Jesus Christ alone. With all humility we need to turn to Jesus for help. In the letter to the Hebrews also we read, **“Because he himself was tested by what he suffered he is able to help those who are being tested” (Heb. 2:18).** Dear friends, let us not rely on our strength alone when we are tempted; rather let us turn to Jesus and he will strengthen us and help us to overcome the temptations. In the Book of Sirach the author instructs us, *“Rely not on your wealth; say not; I have the power. Rely not on your strength in following the desires of your hearts” (Sir. 5:1-2).* No doubt, the observance of the Lent will give us the spiritual strength we need to fight against the devil.