

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT; Cycle – A; Feb. 26th 2023
Genesis 2: 7-9, 3: 1-7; Romans 5: 12-19; Matthew 4: 1-11

Dear Sisters & Brothers,

As the Lent is associated with the 40 days of fasting and prayer of Jesus in the desert, we cannot miss his temptations. That is why on the first Sunday of Lent every year the Church brings to attention the temptations of Jesus and that of the first parents. The Church has specific reason for that. Taking the temptation of the first parents and the temptations of Jesus in the desert, the Church brings out the **contrast between the two**. As the Church looks at, the first Adam failed to overcome the temptation; whereas Jesus, the second Adam, defeated the devil and the temptations boldly. The temptation of Adam and Eve didn't end in the Garden of Eden; rather the extension of which continued through the history. Under the old covenant we see the constant temptations of Israel in the desert against their fidelity to God and their utter failure. We see even their great kings like David and Solomon yielding to their temptations. So God abolished the old covenant and made the new covenant through His Son Jesus Christ. **But God didn't spare His Son from temptations either; he too was tempted in the same desert with greed of power and popularity; he was tempted to use an easy way to accomplish his Mission.** That is what we have heard in the gospel. We should not take the account literally and conclude that the devil was following Jesus physically and taking him place to place; not at all. We should consider the temptations of Jesus as the inner prompting the devil induced in him. In today's gospel Matthew says, *"At that time Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil."* Remember, at the baptism the voice of the Heavenly Father declared, *"This is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased."* (Mt 3:17). Every time, by defeating the temptation, Jesus proved that indeed he is the beloved Son.

We should not be under the impression that with the three temptations, Jesus was fully relieved of all temptations for the rest of his life. They accompanied with him through his public life and finally reached Mount Calvary with him. For instance, according to John's gospel chapter six, the crowd that enjoyed the multiplication of the bread, gave Jesus a strong temptation to become their king and the disciples encouraged the same. But he ran up to the mountain alone and spent time in prayer to get strength to overcome it. During the agony in the Garden Jesus was tempted to run away from the crucifixion. He pleaded with the Father, *"My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me."* But soon he added, *"Yet, not as I will, but as you will."* (Mt. 26:39). On the cross he was tempted to give up his trust in the Heavenly Father. He cries out, *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me."* (Mt.27: 46). But the next moment he confessed his trust in the Father saying, *"Father, into your hands I commend my spirit"* (Luke 23: 46).

Once again Jesus became the good role model for everybody by overcoming the temptations.

Though temptation itself is not something good, we have a great lesson to learn from the temptations of Jesus, especially how he defeated them. We too are put in tests and trials and temptations against our faith in God so that we may prove that we are the true disciples of Jesus. Sometimes, the temptations we undergo may not be very big in nature, but it may be enough to jeopardize even our eternal life. Remember, Adam and Eve lost the Paradise over the temptation to eat the forbidden fruit; or we can say that they were tempted to satisfy their greed. Very often our temptations also come in small scale and they look to be innocent; **it can be a little greed, pride, vengeance against our neighbor and our mistrust in God.** When we yield to these temptations we are defeated and the devil can easily take us to the next worse realm. The devil will approach someone only at the vulnerable time. Eve was all alone in the garden, so it was easy for the devil to cheat her; Jesus was very hungry after long days of fasting and prayer. The devil will look for opportunity in our vulnerable moments like, frustration, sadness, anger and laziness. And also the devil will appear before us in the most attractive way, with attractive offerings.

Jesus overcame his temptations by intense prayer and fasting. So the practice of **the great virtues like prayer, fasting and almsgiving** will help us also to overcome our temptations and strengthen our faith. Prayer and fasting, together with the full trust in the Lord, are the **formidable weapons we have against devil** and our temptations. Again the temptations are the real challenges sometimes God gives us to test our faith and spiritual strength. Once we fight them out with the help of God, we achieve more strength to overcome them. In the Book of Sirach we read, ***“My child, when you come to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for testing.” (Sir. 2:1).*** If Jesus had been tempted many times, then what would be our conditions who are very vulnerable? No one can escape temptations, but can expect the help of God to overcome them. St. Paul in 1Cor 10:13 says, ***“No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation He will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”*** In the Letter to the Hebrews, the author comforts the faithful, ***“Because he himself was tested through what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.”*** The only one who can understand our weakness is Jesus Christ; the only one who can help us in our temptation is also Jesus Christ.