

1st Sunday of Lent Homily A Cycle, 3-9-14

(Lights dim five minutes before the beginning of mass)

Dispel the Darkness: Be the Light (Have the lights turned on).

Wouldn't it be nice to live out our parish theme for lent, "Dispel the Darkness: Be the Light", as it is to turn on the lights! But just as Jesus spent 40 days and forty nights in the desert, so we enter this season of becoming light in the Lord.

As we begin this 40 day season of Lent we hear in the Gospel reading that immediately after his baptism, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert for 40 days and 40 nights. During those 40 days Jesus is reflecting on one fact: he is the beloved of his Father. Remember, he was told this at his baptism in the Jordan. "You are my son, my beloved, in whom I am well pleased.

And scripture simply says that after 40 days "the tempter came". And the devil tempts Jesus three times.

Temptations:

1st Temptation: Story of pilgrimages in the Middle Ages: a rich tradition in the Church in Europe (expand). Much like our 40 days of Lent.

(expand examples of Native American sweat lodges; Ramadan) All were experiences of purification and the core beliefs of life.

For forty days Jesus fasted; he is hungry. Realizing this, the tempter challenged him. “Turn the stones into bread: But Jesus knows one thing: his stomach may be empty, but he will still be filled with the love of the Father. No matter how hungry and thirsty he is, the Father will never abandon him. Jesus was able to respond to the devil, “Not by bread alone do we live but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

2nd Temptation: throw yourself off the pinnacle of the temple: corners of the pinnacle of temple had eagle’s wings. God will protect you. He will make sure you are safe.

Jesus will be hurt, but he is still the Beloved Son.

The other day I was talking with a newly ordained priest who is thinking about ministering in the city. He came up to me and asked: Will I be safe in the city? Then after reflecting on his own question, he said he simply needed to trust in Jesus. It may or may not be safe for him to minister in the city, but he is still, like Jesus, always remains a Beloved Son.

Some of us may suffer with our own physical: diseases, cancer, diabetes, HIV: we know that while we may be hurting, we are still the beloved of the Father.

3rd Temptation: Finally, the devil promises to give Jesus all the power in the world; he can rule over all nations if Jesus only bows down and worships him.

But Jesus knows, though he may be politically powerless in life, but he is still the beloved of His Father.

Have you ever tried to get a house torn down in the city?

Have you tried to apply for disability from sickness or an accident?

You know how powerless you can feel.

(Tell the story about being at Mayor Mike Duggan's State of the City address; I was asked to do the benediction and then being told during Duggan's address that I was going to be dropped from the program because he had gone overtime. There are things in life over which we are powerless)

So often we are even powerless to change something going on with our parents or our children or our church, but know we are still the beloved of the Father.

(Pause)

Facing a temptation is like standing on the edge of a cliff; either we jump or we step back. Either we say

- **God does not care for me because I am hungry,**
- **or God has abandoned me because I have a terminal or chronic disease,**
- **or God has forgotten me because I am powerless over a situation in life.**

The temptation to enter the darkness of sin comes quickly and invites you to move suddenly without much reflection to move away from God. We need to take the time and recall that we are bathing in the love of God at all times.

For instance, there is the American temptation, often called the American dream, to become rich and famous.

- **Make \$75,000 or more a year**
- **Live in West Bloomfield**
- **Own a new car and a big home**
- **Have cash to help relatives and friends who live here and abroad.**

Many of us feel that if we do not reach that American dream, God has abandoned us. We get to thinking that he has blessed only those who are rich.

We often forget what alone can make us happy.

We often forget that we are the beloved.

We live in the darkness and desperation.

This season of Lent God calls us to dispel the darkness and be the light.

Even when we may be hungry or homeless or afraid or feeling powerless. Remember what Jesus said,

- **“Happy the poor in Spirit,**
- **Happy the sorrowing,**
- **Happy the peacemakers.”**

Why are they happy? Because deep down they know that true happiness comes from the knowledge that, first and foremost, that they are the beloved of God.

And how do we need to avoid temptation to live in the darkness?

What we do?

- 1. First we need to be in constant contact with One Jesus called Father; we need pray daily. (comment on the black books and family books)**
- 2. Second, we need good and faith-filled friends who can help us discern the tough choices of life. Is that not the role of being active members of a faith community? (comment on Emmaus Faith Sharing Groups).**
- 3. Finally, we need to become detached from anyone or anything or any desire for power or pleasure which calls us to forget that first and foremost we are Sons and Daughters, beloved of the Father.**

Recently I went to lunch with a young man who has had a very challenging life. He has never met his father or his mother. He bounced from one foster home to another. In his trying just to exist as a young adult, he ended up in prison. Now he is out and working his way through life. At the end of lunch he said something that astounded me. Although it was a Thursday, he said, "You know, it feels like it is Sunday!" It was his way of saying that although life had dealt him some cruel blows, he felt blessed by God. At that moment he could have been Jesus coming out of the Jordan, thoroughly convinced that he is the beloved of God.

My brothers and sisters, as we begin this Lenten journey, let us never forget that we are his beloved. May these forty days be for us a time of renewing our intimacy with the one who alone can bring us fullness of life.