

HOMILY LENT SUNDAY 1-C (Homily 02)

“Let Go and Let God”

(Dt 26:4-10; Psalm 91; Rm 10:8-13; Lk 4:1-13)

A woman back from shopping was showing her husband the expensive dress she had purchased. When he asked her why she bought a dress she did not really need, she replied that she couldn't resist the temptation. Her husband countered with the comment that she should have been like Jesus who told Satan to get behind him. She replied that she did that, and Satan whispered that it looked even better from behind, so she bought it!

The readings this first Sunday of Lent invite us to *Let Go and Let God*.

That well known slogan from the movement of Alcoholics Anonymous, *Let go and let God*, fits this Sunday's gospel especially where we see Jesus being tempted in the desert. We see him letting go and letting God.

As we see, the three temptations are: turning rocks into bread, jumping off the temple to enlist the help of angels and worshipping Satan to obtain personal power.

These temptations can be summed up by the words “Appetite, Arrogance and Ambition,” or “Possessions, Prestige and Power.” In the Spirit, Jesus lets go of all political power and glory, to establish God's reign on earth through total obedience and self denial. This is also our mission and call and Lent is a great time to grow in that regard.

It is no accident that immediately after he was baptized, Jesus was literally driven into the desert to be confronted by Satan and those three basic temptations. In this way, Jesus becomes truly for us the New Israel, facing the same temptations the Israelites faced in the desert, but to which they succumbed over and over again. Unlike Israel, Jesus refuses to give in to these temptations. Jesus chooses to remain totally faithful to his mission from the Father, regardless of the cost which he knew would be his very life.

It is worth noting that Luke changes the order of the temptations from that of Matthew, putting the incident at the Temple last, so that they end up in Jerusalem. For Luke, the whole gospel is all about one journey to Jerusalem,

where Jesus would be ultimately tested on the cross. That is the “opportune time” that is mentioned in the last line of today’s gospel. This testing in the desert was just a foretaste of what was to come. The rest of the gospel, in Luke, is one single-minded journey to Jerusalem where Jesus would suffer and die for us, to redeem us, to break the cycle of violence in the world, to bring about the possibility of a new kind of life for us and for all humankind.

Fr. Raymond Dlugos, former director of Southdown, a renewal center for clergy and religious near Toronto, presented a fascinating insight into the nature of these temptations at one of their conferences for bishops and major religious superiors.

He stated that there are only two kinds of sin – to be more than human, and to be less than human; to be super-human, or to be sub-human. He tied that in with the temptations in today’s gospel.

Jesus was first tempted to be less than human, to be sub-human, to turn rocks into bread, to let himself go, to give up and to give in, to turn to a life of dissipation, of medicating his pain, of just living for the fun of it. And Jesus said no.

Then he was tempted to be more than human, to be super-human, to go for all the power in the world, or to grab at prestige and success by jumping off the temple. He was tempted to use his divine power for a selfish purpose, to be super-human, to think that he was better than others, to opt for power and control. And again Jesus refused to give in. He chose to be very simply, fully human, to live totally as one of us, only to do so in perfect accord with the will of the Father, even if that took him to the cross, which it did.

What an example he became for us in the process. We are tempted everyday to think that “Appetite, Ambition, and Arrogance”, or “Possessions, Power and Prestige” is what will satisfy us, give our lives meaning, provide us with purpose. Everyday, we must have the faith to follow Jesus’ example, to see through these temptations, to see them for what they are, illusions and lies, and to say “No” like Jesus. Like Jesus, we can choose to be fully human and go through the pain of being human with faith, rather than try to go around it or medicate that pain with addictive behaviour. We must also let go and let God.

In his letter to the Romans today, St. Paul, who experienced the love and forgiveness of the Risen Lord on the road to Damascus, affirms us in our choice. For St. Paul, it is first of all about believing in Jesus who is the Word made flesh. Then it is about confessing that faith, demonstrating that faith through our actions. We do that especially by resisting those same temptations in our lives, however they will manifest themselves and however attractive they may seem. We must like Jesus, see through them and choose to be fully human.

Then we will be able to make sense of the first reading, in which Moses instructs the Israelites in their own desert to give sacrifices of gratitude to God for the mighty way that God had liberated them from their slavery and captivity in Egypt. Unlike the Israelites, however, we will be thanking God for liberating us from the power of sin and healing us from our own sinfulness, our defects of character, our negative attitudes and painful emotions that would make us sin.

A little story captures the spirit of letting go and letting God. A rich man fell ill and no amount of medical attention could help him. Finally a traveling magician suggested putting a happy man's shirt on his back and he would be well. The man's family sought a truly happy man for days. One son traveled day after day and finally sought rest in a cave, where he heard a voice exclaim, "How happy I am. What a good day I had. And now for a good night's rest." Delighted to have achieved his goal, he was about to ask for the man's shirt when he realized the man had none. He told the man that he had heard he was happy, and wanted to take his shirt because it alone could save his father's life. The man replied that if he had a shirt, he would no longer be happy.

The Eucharist that we celebrate today is the ultimate sacrifice of gratitude. We offer to God the very body and blood of Jesus who was totally faithful to the Father, who resisted the temptations to sell out, who gave his life for us on the Cross.

May our celebration today strengthen our faith in the power of God to work in our lives, and help us to confess that faith by letting go and letting God.