

From The Pastor

It is not by accident that the Church begins the season of Lent with the temptation of Jesus in the desert. The core brokenness of the human person is the disorder and deception of sin. This disorder is manifested in countless ways of human behavior caused by our offenses against one another. Having been hurt, the most natural reaction is to hurt back. Sin begets sin, pain begets pain. We seek the good of peace and communion with others, but our lives are constantly in tension with others due to the confusion and deceptions of wounded hearts.

Lent begins with the temptation of Jesus by Satan in the desert because we are tempted. God came to share our human experience, and that experience is under the influence and effect of the Evil one. In his humanity, Jesus is confronted with the kinds of deception and confusion that we must regularly resist if we are to know and live in the peace of God.

It could be said that there are three essential movements of Satan in scripture. This is not inclusive, but for our purpose, it is consistent. The Lenten season is baptismal in nature and prepares the believer to a renewed proclamation of faith at the Easter sacraments. This profession of faith moves to the core of the Christian truth. It is articulated in the second reading today; 'if you confess with your mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.'

Why is this action of God necessary for our salvation? The work of the Cross is to defeat the power of evil caused by Satan, and evident in our lives through personal sin. The first essential movement of evil is in the Garden of Eden. It's the apple and the snake story. The deception of evil is half-truths; close enough to the truth to sound right, but in the end very wrong. The devil invites Adam and Eve to be like God, saying that God knows this if they were to eat from the forbidden tree. They are tricked into thinking that God does not have their best interests in mind; that God is only trying to have power over them by keeping them from divine knowledge.

This is the fall. We wanted to be like God in a way we cannot be like God. God is God, and we are not. We are invited to share the fullness of the divine life with God, but not as God.

The second essential movement of Evil in scripture is the temptation of Jesus in the desert. So arrogant and prideful is the devil, that he will even tempt the divine\human One. Jesus rejects the deceptions and enticements of evil because he is secure in the truth of the Father's unchanging love. It is not that Jesus did not feel the pain and tension of these temptations, but that he saw the truth for what it was and chose the constancy of the divine love that he knew to be the very truth of his existence.

The third essential action of evil is in the garden of Gethsemane. Again, Jesus is confronted with the deception of evil as he faces the pain of the Cross and the loss of his life. This is the action of God's salvation. Love will triumph over the lies and confusion of all that is false and deceptive.

Jesus knew the experience of sin and its pain of separation from the Father. This is part of the deception. In sin, we feel separated from God, but God has not separated himself from us. In our weakness, we fear and mistrust. The shame and guilt of sin causes us to not realize or trust that God remains with us. We doubt, and surrender to the satisfactions and comforts of the world. Why? Because it gives us a greater sense of control, thinking what God can't or won't do for me, I will do for myself. Jesus did not take this route. In the face of pain and death Jesus trusted the core truth of his reality to the Father's love. Jesus is not saved from the Cross. He is saved, and we along with him, through the Cross. Jesus goes through the reality of sin and death and defeats its power by the new life of the Resurrection. As for Jesus, so for us. This is the bold proclamation of our faith.

The core temptation is to deny that we are the beloved of God. Satan's goal is to have us deny and mistrust the truth of our existence in the mystery of divine love. We are created to be loved by God, and in that love, to give God glory. Being under the weight of sin and the uncertainty of death, we fall under the weight and accept the limited securities and satisfactions of the world. This is what Satan wants: 'don't trust God, God will fail you. Go to the world and use its power and security for yourself.'

This is the lie. The truth is the gift of God in Jesus Christ. This is the point and the purpose of the Incarnation. God so loved the world that he sent his only Son into the world that the world might be saved through him. You are saved. You are loved and valued by God as you are. This is the truth. The pains and limitations that we experience in this life that keep us from the peace of God are not God's doing or God's intention. God did not come to condemn, but to save.

Sadly, there is a dark side to life. It is part of what it means to be human. We are challenged to bear with patience the trials that are ours, in light of the great gift we have been given in Christ Jesus who is our truth. The Cross has defeated the power of evil with the surrounding truth of love. This is our foundation and our peace. God is love. Love is truth. Jesus is God.

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