

Homily

March 10, 2019 – The 1st Sunday of Lent

By: Deacon Steve Livingston

Every year on the First Sunday of Lent we hear the gospel story of Jesus being tempted by Satan. Today we hear St. Luke's version. Fresh from His baptism by John in the Jordan, Jesus went into the desert to pray and fast for forty days. This story of His temptations teaches us not to let **self**-interest govern our lives. ... It demonstrates that ... with the devils help ... we can always find reasons, arguments and logic to allow ourselves to give **into** temptation. ... Lent is our time to reflect on the way **we** live ... to let **our** faith grow and be tested in **our** desert for forty days. During Lent, the church invites us to examine **our** lives, to repent of **our** sins and do penance. By means of fasting and prayers, the we obtain strength we need to overcome sin in our lives.

The first Lent I can remember ... I think I was probably in the first grade ... my mother asked me what **I** was going to give up for Lent. Sensing an opportunity ... I proudly and **piously** offered that I would sacrifice all my green bean and asparagus portions for the duration of Lent. She, of course, lovingly countered that perhaps giving up ice cream, candy or soda pop might be more appropriate. It seems I had missed the point!

Ash Wednesday we began yet another Lent and ... the **disciplines** we are to practice if we are to have a **truly** blessed observance of Lent ... are of course prayer, fasting and almsgiving ... not ostentatiously ... not to be seen by others but quietly ... unobtrusively ... between each of us ... and our God.

When we think of alms-giving we usually think of giving money to the poor ... and that is wonderful and I would never discourage it ... but ... if we are honest ... do we not usually give of our surplus ... that which we do not really miss? Perhaps ... in addition to monetary alms-giving ... this Lent we might be to try to give something more of **ourselves** ... perhaps some of our time. A recent survey among Catholics gave us some good news, some bad news and some worse news. The good news is that 61% spend at least some individual prayer time with God every day. The bad news that the other 39% pray only once a week, once a month ... or less! The worse news is that less than 25% practice any kind of regular daily devotion such as

Liturgy of the hours, Lectio Divina, scripture reading or even a simple rosary. If we are going to have a meaningful relationship with our God ... daily prayer is a **must!** If we are to resist the temptations of the evil one ... daily prayer is a **must!** And if we are to gain the fruits of the salvation our Savior suffered and died to give us ... daily prayer is an **absolute must!**

Lent is not only a time of prayer ... it is a time of fasting. In our Gospel reading for today ... Jesus joins fasting to prayer - and so should we. And I would like to share some thoughts on prayer and fasting. I'm not just talking about the Lenten fast prescribed by the Church ... which over the years has dwindled to the point where it's a mere two days. No ... I am talking about the kind of fast that allows us to pray. People say they don't have time to pray, to say the rosary, to visit the Blessed Sacrament ... to meditate on a Scripture reading. But they **do** have time for TV, video games, or surfing the Internet. And in themselves ... there is nothing **wrong** with these things **but** ... might I suggest that fasting from one or more of these things might allow us to spend more time in prayer. Perhaps those who feel they don't have time to pray ... might want to fast from that TV show that consumes their time ... maybe even wastes their time ... time that might be spent with God in prayer. Maybe just one TV show ... what a blessed tradeoff!

And may I further suggest that a good fast might be to fast from those things that do us harm ... those things that actually damage us ... perhaps we might fast from those foods we are not supposed to eat. We might fast from those things that damage our relationships ... that place ... those people ... that lead us to do things of which we are ashamed. These are **fasts** ... that will allow us the time to virtually **feast** ... on our relationship with our God.

In closing I would like to share with you some thoughts on fasting ... and **feasting** ... from ... *A Lenten Prayer* by William Arthur Ward: **Fast** from judging others; **feast** on the Christ indwelling in them. ... **Fast** from darkness; **feast** on light. ... **Fast** from words that pollute; **feast** on phrases that purify. ... **Fast** from discontent; **feast** on gratitude. ... **Fast** from anger; **feast** on patience. ... **Fast** from pessimism; **feast** on optimism. ... **Fast** from worry; **feast** on trust. ... **Fast** from complaining; **feast** on appreciation. ... **Fast** from negatives; **feast** on affirmatives. ... **Fast** from unrelenting pressures; **feast** on unceasing prayer. ... **Fast** from hostility; **feast** on nonviolence. ... **Fast** from bitterness; **feast** on forgiveness. ... **Fast** from self-concern; **feast** on compassion for others. ... **Fast** from personal anxiety; **feast** on eternal truth. ... **Fast** from discouragement; **feast** on hope. ... **Fast** from facts that depress; **feast** on truths that uplift. ...

Fast from lethargy; **feast** on enthusiasm. ... **Fast** from suspicion; **feast** on truth. ... **Fast** from idle gossip; **feast** on purposeful silence. ... Gentle God, during this season of fasting and feasting, gift us with your presence so we can be a **gift** to others in carrying out your work. I wish you all a blessed and prayerful Lent of both fasting ... and feasting.