

1 LENT MARCH 13, 2011 CYCLE "A"

THEME: BEYOND TEMPTATION – ARMED WITH GOD’S WORD

READINGS: Gen. 2:15-17; 3:1-7, Ps. 32, Rom. 5:12-19, Matt. 4:1-11

Just last Wednesday we began the Lenten Season with a beautiful and meaningful celebration of Ash Wednesday. We were marked with the cross of ashes on our foreheads, signifying that we are sinners and totally dependent upon God. Now we have begun in earnest that journey to Jesus’ cross and resurrection.

Did you know that we are 4 days into this new season and have already come to the first Sunday? Don’t let the season of Lent get away from you. During this special time we emphasize the need to repent, turn from sin and temptation and journey with Christ to his cross and resurrection. How many of you remember the movie THE EXORCIST? I can still see very clearly the picture of the young girl in bed, her head spinning all the way around, saying terrible words to the priest who was trying to exorcize or cast the devil out of her, the awful green stuff coming from her mouth and flying right on the priest, and the sizzle of the holy water when it was cast on her. The whole point here was to cast the devil out of this girl. For us as we consider this special season of the year is not so much casting the devil out of ourselves but we should be more concerned about keeping the devil from entering us in the first place. There is no question that we live in a sinful world today. Some still want to do away with even the notion of sin, not to mention temptation. It seems to me that it is quite obvious. Just look at the effects of sin around us: war, racism, injustice, drugs, pollution, crime and on and on. Donna and I were having lunch with a friend a while back, and the subject of paying your income taxes came up. Our friend commented that the Federal Income tax laws have created more liars in the U.S. than anything else. A funny, but not so funny remark. When considering what is acceptable behavior today in regard to sexual behavior, promiscuity, pre-marital sex, multiple partners, just makes you cringe. Where have our moral principles gone?

When we turn back to the Word of God we see in Genesis today, we find two great theological truths: 1) creation and 2) the fall of man. First God created us in his own image and likeness. We were meant to live in a sinless world of beauty, love and peace. And God took Adam and placed him in the Garden of Eden, gave him dominion over it and all the wonderful things there so that he would live in peace and happiness. We were to live in a sinless world of beauty, love and peace. But (now

comes the second theological truth) Adam, (in Hebrew the name Adam stands for every man and woman) fell, sinned! The ancient story in Genesis shows profound theological insight. Its basic message is that human beings cannot blame God or an evil snake, or fate for their plight. They are directly responsible for it themselves. The man and woman made wrong choices, which conflict with their destiny as God had created them. We are responsible for giving in to our temptations, we are responsible for our own sins.

In our second reading we see Paul contrast the first Adam, the sinner, with the second Adam, the sanctifier. “Therefore just as one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man’s act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. For Just as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.” Rom.5:18-19. We are all participants in Adam and Eve’s sin because of the corporateness of the human family. We are all one. We are all sinners. But we are all saved by the grace of God through the new Adam. Liberated from the curse of sin by Jesus. So much depends on one man! Either the first Adam or the second Adam. We need to ask ourselves, under which Adam do we live?

In our Gospel reading we see the confrontation between Jesus, the second Adam, and the devil. Remember we just mentioned some of the effects of Satan in today’s world, and they are even more manifest than ever. Here we see Jesus when he is most vulnerable as a man. He is hungry, fasting 40 days. He is weak, tired, exhausted and now tempted by Satan. Isn’t it also when we seem to be the most vulnerable that we are tempted? When we are most prone to give in to sin? Jesus’ temptations indicate to us that he was truly and fully human. Satan considered him a human being capable of being tempted. As a matter of fact, he kept asking him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread...If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down,” and finally if you give yourself to me, if you “fall down and worship me” I will know that you are nothing more than a weak human and I will have the control over you. Even though Jesus was tempted in all ways as we are, he did not sin.

It is through the power of God’s Word that Satan is turned away. The power of God’s Word is in its truth. Since Satan is a liar and the father of lies, he cannot tolerate truth. Jesus today defended himself with the Word. Even when the devil tries to use God’s Word Jesus disarms him. “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’” Matt.4:10. And the last line of our

Gospel passage says it all, "Then the devil left him and suddenly angels came and waited on him." Matt. 4:11.

So what about us? If we conquer our temptations through the power of God's Word, will not his angels come and minister to us as well? Remember you could be settling beside one of God's angels, one of his messengers on earth right now. So what will accompany us on our journey through this Lenten Season? 1) We must acknowledge that we are sinners, sons and daughters of Adam and Eve and in need of redemption. 2) Look to the one who saved us, Jesus. Imitate him by avoiding temptation. And 3) act as Jesus in defeating Satan by arming yourselves with God's sacred Word! Our Lord went alone into the desert to confront the devil. He knew that the only way to defeat the evil one was to stand face-to-face with him and conquer him with the Word of God. Go and do the same. **Amen.**

Pastor Barney