

## **FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT-MARCH 6, 2022**

**READINGS: Deuteronomy 26:4-10;**

**Responsorial Psalm-Psalm 91;**

**Romans 10:8-13;**

**Gospel of Luke 4: 1-13**

### **Challenging our temptations.**

Two years ago, when the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 as pandemic, almost every country including Canada went into lockdown. The lockdown came with some restrictions: we were allowed to work from home except the front line workers who went to work; we were not allowed to leave our homes except for essential errands and for exercise and we were not allowed to visit others including our loved ones in hospitals and in other places of care. All sports events and entertainment were cancelled. We could not come to church. Looking back at the beginning of the pandemic, we might have experienced the lockdown as a beginning of a new journey of life, a period of loneliness and uncertainty. We wondered about the future. We can describe the lockdown as a period of reflection. We reflected on how we were to live and how things might turn out over the course of the pandemic.

On Ash Wednesday, as Christians we began the Season of Lent. We began a new journey of faith-- a period of a different type of reflection. On this First Sunday of Lent, the readings talk about the meaning of Lent as a time of reflection. We begin with the first reading from the Book of Deuteronomy. The passage begins, "Moses spoke to the people, saying: When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of the Lord your God, you shall make this response before the Lord your God." The basket mentioned in the opening sentence of today's passage referred to the first fruits of the land. Every year the Israelite farmer offered some of the produce of the harvest in thanksgiving to God for a good harvest. The setting of today's passage is in the desert as the Israelites journeyed from slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land. We hear that Moses gave the Israelites a formula of words to say when they offered their first fruits to God. The word "Aramean" is supposed to be either a reference to the origin of the patriarchs from Aram-naharaim (Gen. 24:10), or merely in the sense of the word "nomad". In the formula of words, Moses reminded the Israelites of their lives as slaves in Egypt and of God's power to deliver them from their enemies.

The Book of Deuteronomy portrays the Israelites at a critical time: they were wandering in the desert for forty years on their journey to a "land flowing with milk and honey". We can describe the time of the Israelites in the desert as a time of reflection, a time when they experienced being tested. And they stumbled; they became unfaithful to God. The formula that Moses gave to the people was to assure them of who they were and of what God had done for them. The formula was about God's fidelity and his protection to his people.

The story of the Israelites' journey through the desert leads us to the Gospel passage from Luke. The passage begins with these words, "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil." Today's passage comes after Jesus' baptism in the Jordan by John the Baptist. Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit had descended upon him at his baptism. The number "forty" recalls the forty years the Israelites spent wandering in the desert after their departure from Egypt. Today's Gospel passage is the account of Jesus' temptation in the desert. The temptation story is also reported in the other two Synoptic Gospels- Matthew and Mark. Luke's version of the temptation story is as detailed as the one reported in Matthew's Gospel. The temptations the devil presented to Jesus in today's narrative mirror realities that can tempt us all. We can be tempted by our desire for material goods-- in Jesus' case the devil tempted him with bread. We can be tempted by the promise of power and glory. We can be tempted by the belief that we can be like God. We hear that Jesus responded to each of the devil's temptations by quoting passages from the Book of Deuteronomy. For example, when tempted by the devil to change stones into bread to satisfy his hunger, Jesus quoted the passage where Moses taught the people that "one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." (Deut. 8:3).

Unlike the narrative in Matthew's Gospel, the order of the temptations in Luke's Gospel concluded on the pinnacle of the temple in Jerusalem. The conclusion of the temptations in Jerusalem was important to the development of Luke's theology. In choosing Jerusalem as the location for the last temptation, Luke identified Jerusalem as the place where Jesus would ultimately face his destiny (Luke 9:51).

My brothers and sisters in Christ, when we examine the first reading and the Gospel passage, we can learn that they are connected to each other. The events in the first reading and in the Gospel passage took place in the desert. The word "desert" or "wilderness" in the Bible is considered a place of danger, fear and full of questioning. It is also a place where people have had an encounter with God. In the Book of Kings (1 Kings 19), the prophet Elijah encountered God in the desert when he was discouraged. The Israelites faced many temptations throughout their forty-year stay in the desert, and they stumbled. The Evangelist Luke used today's story to present Jesus as offering a perfect resistance to temptations.

Jesus' triumph over the devil's temptations makes him a model for all those who believe in him. In the second reading from the Letter to the Romans, Paul taught the early Christians about the universality of God's offer of salvation in Jesus Christ. According to Paul, "there is no distinction between the Jew and the Greek: the same Lord is the Lord of all." Jesus the Lord "is generous to all who call on him."

My brothers and sisters in Christ, we have come together to celebrate the Eucharist, our spiritual nourishment for our Lenten journey. What do the three readings teach us about Lent as a time of reflection? The readings teach us that Lent is a time of discernment, a time to test the spirit and a time to examine our own values as people

of faith. Lent can be a new beginning for us to examine how we live. This is similar to what was reported after the COVID-19 lockdown. It was reported that during the lockdown we learned to do things differently by becoming creative; we became aware of what we considered as important to us in our lives; in the absence of community Mass, we learned new ways to continue our spiritual growth--we did some spiritual reading including reading the Bible; we learned to show more concern for others and our families became more united.

As we continue our forty-day Lenten Journey of reflection, today's readings encourage us to examine our lives in the spirit of the Gospel. Our actions based on our faith, and our faith in God may guide us to an improved spiritual relationship with God and with our neighbour. As we come to receive the Eucharist, let us turn to Jesus to show us how to challenge our temptations so that we become renewed in the Spirit.

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