

## Sunday of the First Week of Lent

Year A

Gen 2:7-9; 3:1-7

Ps 51:3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 17

Rom 5: 12-19

Matt 4: 1-11

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As we enter into the Lenten season the Church invites us to look within ourselves in order to observe and reflect upon our inner landscape. Augustine, in his day, invited the faithful to “return to their heart” especially during these forty days of preparation for the celebration of the great Paschal mystery.

What we tend to discover on this interior journey is strikingly similar to a battlefield where a constant struggle is being waged, in this case between the desire to do good and the temptation to seek primarily my own personal benefit, without taking into consideration the common good nor the harm done by my acts of selfishness. This inner battle is much more significant than the primary contests currently being waged, even more important than the struggles on the field of battle in Afghanistan and Iraq. More significant, yet intimately related at the same time.

On our journey within we are invited to discover what might yet be present there of the primeval paradise, where “God caused to grow from the ground every kind of tree that is pleasing to see and good to eat”, where God walked and talked with us as friends, where people lived in harmony. Unfortunately, that original communion was disrupted by our failure to reject the temptation of putting ourselves in God’s position.

In our daily struggle to live the Christian life and promote growth in holiness there are many enticing distractions in the garden. Of course they are good in and of themselves, since they were created by God as a gift for us, but we are called to worship not the gift but the Giver. Overcoming that temptation is a daily struggle, complicated by our consumer mentality, battered by the droning drill of commercial advertising enticing us to need what we want rather than to want what we truly need. Lent is the time to discover precisely what we truly need.

In stark contrast to the primordial paradise, today’s Gospel passage paints the picture of Jesus being led into the barren desert by the Spirit in order to be tempted. After forty days without food, Jesus was hungry, his attention was focused, he was prepared for the inner struggle. He was tempted and he beat back the enticement with the inner strength derived from the wisdom of Scripture. In this struggle he has taken on our human condition in its entirety, teaching us by his example the manner of managing our temptations today.

We too, while not exactly physically hungry, experience the want and need for nourishment and strength. We struggle to fill the inner void caused by the meaningless struggle to accumulate, to possess more material goods, bigger and better, ultra and maxi. We convince ourselves that we need these things, that we deserve them, that we have a right to possess all that we can. Sooner or later the futility of this path becomes evident to us and we are once again invited to “return to our heart”. It is there that we will find what we truly long for.

Our hearts are restless and they find true peace only in God’s love. God’s grace abounds

– as Saint Paul assures us - and although we have done nothing to merit that grace, we can count on it. This is our rock, our source of strength, our inner force and consolation. God loves us, personally and as a people. This outpouring of gratuitous love inspires us to respond in kind, out of gratitude. The One who loves us boundlessly asks us to demonstrate our gratitude by loving one another, even to the point of loving those who despise us in return.

Lent is a time for journeying into the inner desert, led by the Spirit, to face our temptations, to do battle with all that seeks to separate us from the true source of life. Like Jesus, and with his help, we can rely on the divine wisdom of sacred scripture as well as the Bread of eternal life to guide us in discovering God as the true center of our lives.