

LENTEN HOMILIES 2010

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

21 February 2010

First Reading: Deuteronomy 26:4-10

Second Reading: Romans 10:8-13

Gospel: Luke 4:1-13

RESISTING TEMPTATIONS

Why does Lent last for forty days? Well, that's a good question and one that deserves a good answer.

Yes, Lent is a period of forty days between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday. It seems that in the Bible the number forty is an important symbol indicating a special time during which a person or a group of people undergo significant events in their lives. For example, the prophet Moses spent forty days on Mount Horeb without touching food or water. Elijah walked forty days to reach the Mountain of God. The flood in the Old Testament lasted forty days. Similarly, the people of Nineveh spent forty days undergoing a purification of their lives through penance.

The Gospel of today, the First Sunday of Lent, shows us Jesus being tempted. This took place while he was in the desert for forty days to prepare for his ministry and discover what kind of Messiah he was expected to be. The temptations were all ways in which the Evil One tried to distract Jesus from his true mission. He was tempted to turn stones into bread because he was hungry. However, he pointed out that the food that really gives life is spiritual, the Word of God. Further, he was tempted to win glory for himself by dramatically throwing himself into the air to be rescued by angels – but he refused any such showy act. Even when he was offered power over all the kingdoms of this world, the Lord did not give into this alluring but deceitful temptation.

By resisting all these temptations, Jesus showed what kind of Messiah he was going to be. He is the kind of Messiah that depends totally on God's providence, turns the spotlight away from himself, and knows that true power comes from God alone. During his time in the desert, Jesus overcame temptations by quoting from the Bible, the Word of God, which truly sustains and shows the correct path of relating to God. Indeed, Our Lord teaches us today to use Scripture to repulse the temptations of the Devil.

In the second reading today, St. Paul indicates the manner in which we are saved. It is by having faith in God and confessing our dependence on his Word that we are saved from sin. The Word of God is a powerful weapon that can liberate us from the slavery of sin that ruins our lives. It is the same Word that Jesus used when he emerged successful in resisting temptations.

In the first reading we hear how God liberated the people of Israel from the cruel domination of the Egyptians. Yahweh the God of Israel redeemed his people in a spectacular fashion. He subdued the Egyptians and led his people into a beautiful and prosperous land. The Israelites were saved by the mighty hand of God. It is their obedience to the Word of God through the prophet Moses that saved them.

This time of Lent that we are now beginning can be seen as a special time for us Christians, the new People of God today, to undergo some purification of our lives in order to prepare ourselves to celebrate the great feast of Easter. During this time of Lent we can ask ourselves: what sort of Christians do we really want to be? Do we want to be the Christian that only offers lip service to what they believe in without matching it with the proper attitudes, authentic lifestyles?

It's unfortunate but true that in Zambia today, we have many people who claim to be Christians but their attitudes and lifestyles do not match with what they profess. They are only interested in making their lives comfortable and frequently this means they will go against Christian principles to enrich themselves. As we know, this is not only petty thieves but also very prominent persons in the public life of the country. Indeed, some of them are not afraid to steal from the public purse in order to ensure that they have fancy clothes, big houses and deluxe cars, become famous and rule the rest of the country.

The Word of God challenges us and that is why the Church often has to speak out about corruption and political mischief in Zambia. Not to do this, to remain silent, would only be to encourage that dishonesty and thus keep Zambia poor and struggling. Yes, at social levels as well as at personal levels, our Church has a message about honesty and service of the people. We call that message the "church's social teaching." And it is founded on the Word of God!

So, we should see that it is really a blessing, a gift from our loving God, that we now have these forty days of Lent as a time of conversion and renewal. It is a period when all of us should take some time to seriously think about our lives and identify the things that prevent us from leading good and faithful lives.

During Lent we show how sorry we are on account of our sins by fasting (from food or drink or entertainment or something else good), giving alms (sharing something with the poor around us, like money or time), and praying (spending some extra time at Mass, in morning and evening prayers, in the Small Christian Community).

We all know that like Jesus we too are tempted in many ways. We frequently lack the power to resist these temptations. We often find ourselves not leading the lives we want to. On our own we cannot win the fight against the evil around us and within us. We need help from a higher power. This help is readily available in the Word of God that we hear proclaimed every Sunday during Mass, that we share in each week during the Small Christian Community meetings, and that we read at home for a few minutes each day. If we have faith in this Word, we too can be saved.

What we need to do is to acknowledge our powerlessness and to accept the Word of God in our lives. If we allow this Word to work freely without any hesitation then we will join St Paul in attesting to the power of faith to heal and strengthen and give new life.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND SHARING IN SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

1. In what ways are we tempted as individuals and community and how do we respond?
2. Do we trust in the providence of God to resist temptation?
3. Do we adequately use the riches of the Church Social Teaching to address the social injustices we face because of others (leaders especially) who succumb to temptations of amassing power and acting out of self interests?

COMMUNITY PRAYERS

- Lord, you showed us in the forty days in which you were tempted by the evil one that trusting in the power of the Lord is the only right way of fighting evil and other social ills, empower us with the blessing of always acting according to your will and putting our trust in God. *Lord hear our prayer! Lord graciously hear us!*
- Lord you are the source of all goodness; may the coming forty days be of prayer, fasting, and giving alms to share in the goodness and providence of God to others. *Lord hear our prayer!, Lord graciously hear us!*

- Lord, you showed us the true way of reconciliation and peace; may this time of Lent be a moment to learn to truly reconcile with our neighbours so that true peace is always among us.
Lord hear our prayer! Lord graciously hear us!

