

1st week of Lent- B

As we are entering into this season of Lent, our theme today is Temptation. Do you have any temptations? I have at least 100 temptations a day! My 1st temptation this morning was not to get up. 2nd temptation was to eat the wrong things! They are part of our human condition.

Without temptation we will not have the ability to make a choice for God; in that way temptations are just opportunity to grow in God's grace. Praying to the Lord, "lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil", let's celebrate.

Siddhārth Gautama was born in the kingdom of Kapilvastu in Nepal in 563 BC. His father was the king. Being the prince, Siddhārtha had the opportunity to live in luxury. A great visionary came to the palace and told his dad that if Siddhārth stayed inside his palace his whole life, then he would become a great king. To make him a great king his father did one thing. He kept him away from the real world of pain and suffering. When he was 16, his father found a beautiful young lady for Siddhārth to marry. He married the woman named Yashodhara, and they had a son, Rahul. Although the young prince was rich and famous he still was not happy. He wanted to learn the meaning of his existence. He got out of the palace against his father's orders. He saw the "*Four Passing Sights*": an old crippled man, a sick and a dying man, a dead body in a funeral procession, and a homeless but holy and a happy man. Right then, Gautama knew that nothing can stop people from being born, becoming old, getting sick, and dying. He decided to give up his worldly life. He would not keep his wife, his children, his wealth, or his palace. He would become a holy man with no home. He left his home in the middle of a dark and stormy night. In those days holy people were usually ascetics. They practiced self-denial. In pursuit of the real meaning of life He found a fig tree (now called the Bodhi tree) and started to meditate. He told himself that he would not get up

until he had found *enlightenment*. He meditated under the tree for long 49 days. His mind is said to have become pure, he received Enlightenment, and became the Buddha. Being a king Buddha was talking to a group of noble and educated people and he would use the terminology 'enlightenment'. Several years later, Jesus was talking to very ordinary and uneducated people and he would use the terminology 'repentance'. Repentance is enlightenment! We see that in the story of the prodigal son: in faraway country as he was sitting with animals, alone and miserable and he came to his senses. He received enlightenment. It is in silence, self-denial and in desert something wonderful happens to people. They repent or receive enlightenment. Repentance comes from the Greek word "Metanoia," which means, "turn around, stop what you are doing right now and go in the other direction, change the direction of your life." Lent is the opportunity to turn around or stop doing what we are doing right now. Today, let us turn around, and thus take a new direction in our spiritual life.

I went into the seminary when I was fifteen. I was a teenager. Crazy time of your life! I was vulnerable, weak and immature. Then for the next 12 years I was put under masters who would help me to go through a long period of formation. I was not only studying to be a priest; but a religious order priest. Our formation is much more intense. In the 4th year of my seminary, I had to go through one special year of intense formation called 'Novitiate'. It was one full year of silence, meditation, work and prayer. Not much contact with family or friends. It was in fact a desert experience that really reshaped me as new parson. And at the end of the year, I made my decision and made my religious vows of poverty, chastity and obedience (promise). I officially became a seminarian and a member of my Religious community. I heard the devil speaking to me, 'being a priest is too much and I can never do it'. At the same time I heard the Lord speaking to me as well, 'step out of

you comfort zone and follow me and I will take care of you'. " You didn't choose me, I chose you". My challenge was listening to the guiding voice of God and not listening to the tempting voice of Satan.

In today's gospel we read that after Jesus was baptized "the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him" (Mark 1:12-13). Where else but the desert could you have such a meaningful encounter of the Holy Spirit as well as Satan, of the wild beasts as well as the holy angels? The desert was the school where Jesus came to distinguish between the voice of God which He should follow and the voice of Satan which is temptation. How many voices do we hear from the moment we get up in the morning till the moment we go to sleep at night? The countless voices in the daily paper, the soliciting voices on the radio and the television, the voices of those who live and work with us, not forgetting our own unceasing inner voices. In the desert we leave most of these voices behind to focus on distinguishing between the **guiding voice of God and the tempting voice of Satan.**

In the Bible the term "desert" or "wilderness", means solitude, or seclusion. So lent is the season to spent time in solitude and seclusion so that we get the divine guidance to distinguish between the voice of God which he should follow and the voice of Satan which is temptation. The desert is the university where God disciplines us and make us His people. In the desert we come to know ourselves, our strengths and weaknesses. In the desert Jesus encountered beasts and angels. There are wild beasts and angels in everyone of us. Lent is the time for the desert experience. We cannot all afford to buy a camel and head off for the desert. But we can all create a desert space in our overcrowded lives. We can set aside a place and time to be alone daily with God, a time to distance ourselves from the many noises

and voices that bombard our lives every day, a time to hear God's word, a time to rediscover who we are before God, a time to say yes to God and no to Satan as Jesus did. Welcome to Lent! Welcome to the desert!

As you are going into seclusion and silence, you will see devil coming attacking you. If you are walking with devil, you will have no temptation. But if you are walking with Jesus, that is when he gets you and tempts you. Why was Jesus tempted after his baptism? The Fathers of the Church explain that Jesus' temptations are described after his baptism to teach us why we are tempted and show us how we should conquer temptations. Baptism and Confirmation give us the weapons we need to do battle with Satan. God never tempts people, and never permits them to be tempted beyond their strength. But He does allow them to be tempted. Why? Here are the five reasons given by the Fathers: *i*) so that we can learn by experience that we are indeed stronger than the tempter; *ii*) to prevent us from becoming conceited over having God's gifts; *iii*) that the devil may receive proof that we have completely renounced him; *iv*) that by the struggle we may become even stronger; and *v*) that we may realize how precious is the grace we have received.

Life messages: 1) Let us make Lent a time of renewal of life by penance and prayer: in the past church used to be strict and you have to do it. Now it is up to our generosity.

2) Let us convert Lent into a time for spiritual growth and Christian maturity by: a) participating in the Mass each day or at least a few days in the week; b) setting aside some part of our day for personal prayer; c) reading some Scripture, alone or, better still, with others; d) setting aside some money that we might spend

on ourselves for meals, entertainment or clothes and giving it to an organization which takes care of the less fortunate in our society; e) abstaining from smoking or alcohol; f) receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation in Lent and participating in the “Stations of the Cross” on Fridays; g) visiting the sick and those in nursing homes and doing some acts of charity, kindness and mercy every day in the Lent.

3) Let us use Lent as a time to fight daily against the evil within us and around us: Repenting and fighting against temptations and evil is a lifetime's task. Jesus did not overcome Satan in the wilderness; he achieved that only in his death. Lent reminds us that we have to take up the fight each day against the evil within us and around us, and never give up. Jesus has given the assurance that the Holy Spirit is with us, empowering us so that final victory will be ours through Jesus Christ.