

HOMILY ON THE FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT 2018

OUR BATTLE WITH TEMPTATION

Temptation is an inevitable and inescapable phenomenon which every child of Adam will have to necessarily contend with. Christ made it clear to us that it a reality that every man born of a woman must go through but He also warned that we should not be instrumental to it. "Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come"(Mtt 18:7; Lk:1). Elsewhere He exhorts us to be cheerful and courageous when tempted. In the world, He said "you will found trouble and tribulations but be of good courage for I have overcome the world"(Jn. 16:33).

In itself, temptation is neither a sin nor an evil, it is neutral. Another name of temptation is a 'test' or 'examination.' We are attested with different forms of temptations in our daily lives. Just as without test or examinations there is no promotion, so without temptations we cannot prove our fidelity to God nor will our holiness be proven. Again, like test or examination, everyone temptation is dreadful. Dreadful because of the uncertainty that becloud it. We are not sure whether we will crush it or it will crush us.

Temptation is inescapable. Both young and old, beautiful and ugly, good and bad, educated and illiterates, the holy man and sinners. None is too holy that he cannot suffer the assault of temptation. On the contrary, it the holier the person is the strong and more difficult the temptation he will have to contend with. Temptation could be good or bad depending on the attitudes of the one tempted. If we are confident and trusting, the Lord assist us to go through it unharmed and consequently be given the crown of victory; but if on the other hand, we trust in ourselves, we shall shamefully be overcome by temptation and then then become laughing stocks to the devil and the world around us.

There was once a holy monk who lived in a desert, all along he was assailed with temptations. One day he saw a vision. In his vision, he saw around him multitudes of evil spirits struggling with him to pull him down. Each of them would place an obstacle on his way and he always escaped them without falling into any, he looked a little bit ahead and saw innumerable number of people in a place like a stadium with one old and debilitated devil. He summoned courage and asked the leader of those devils surrounding him, 'what have I done to you? Why are all of you

concentrated on me? Look, there are so many people over there and you abandon them all with that old and weak devil and all of you are after me.’ But the devil in response said, “in spite of our number and strength, how many times have we been able to track you down? But look ahead at the stadium’ and the holy monk looked and behold when the old devil in charge of those multitudes of people raises his staff motioning to the people to rise, all would rise and when he told them to jump up, they would jump up.’ The devil continued, ‘have you seen how obedient and submissive they are to the old weak man, but you are not the same, on the contrary, you are very stubborn, to reduce our number is to give you opportunity to make mockery of us.”

The story above confirms the fact that rather than reducing the frequency or gravity of temptation by one holiness it heightens it. It is the higher we attain the spiritual height the heavier our temptation just as the examination set for those in grade seven cannot be the same with those of grade one. The more you conquer, the more graces you will be given to face the greater battle ahead. The Lord had promised us that He would never allow us to be tried beyond our power. Those conflicting suggestions that trouble your minds in times of difficulties, sickness, hunger, war, loss of property, defamation of characters, joblessness, impecuniosity, childlessness/barrenness, death of dear ones etc. are temptations. Your approach to them speaks volumes about fidelity or infidelity to God and helps to define your person. The way you handle will tell us whether you are a saint or sinner. One thing common with temptations of the devil is that he seems to tempt us with the things we love, value or are in most need of.

Although, St. Mark, in his temptation account did not consider necessary to give the detailed account of how Jesus was tempted, both Matthew and Luke did. If the devil dared to tempt Jesus, he will necessarily not spare us. In Jesus’ own temptation, the scripture tells us that Christ fasted for forty days and forty nights and He was very hungry. It was at that point of hunger that the devil went in to tempt Him, telling Him to prove to the world that He was God by commanding the stone around to turn into bread to satiate His hunger.

Man is assailed with temptations as every of his activity is infested with it in different sizes. It will always suggest to you something that could be done to challenge the supremacy of God or to challenge the God head over you. It may be

in the political arena, in your offices, in your shops, in your school, in your relationship with your fellow man/woman. It will suggest to you in a very logical and sound manner reasons why you should disobey or ignore your spouse, parent, elders or superiors etc. Again it may tell you the reasons why you must kill, defame, brutalize, lie steal, be addicted to drug, commit fornication or adultery etc., It has such fanciful logic as the end justifies the means, after I will go to confession, God will understand, etc.

The saints of old have all gone through and trained in the crucible of temptations in one way or the other. In the revelation to St. John we read that John saw a great multitude of people dressed in white robes and the angel leading him asked 'do you know whom these people dressed in white robes are?' and St. John said no, the angel continued, these are people who have passed through many trials, tribulations and persecution of many kind through their perseverance they have been washed in the precious blood of the lamb...(Rev. 7:14).

REPENTANCE:

Christ's first temptation came when He about to begin His ministry. But after His temptations, St. Mark says that He left and began to preach the message of repentance. The message of lent is the message of repentance. In this season, more than any other seasons of the church, repentance is emphasized. Repentance has to do with a rethink, a turning around from our evil behaviours, a change of our value system. It is a period to think about our origin, where we come from and where we are going, our last end. It is a period of stock taking. It is period of diligent search for our creator whom we abandoned to follow the ancient and cunning deceiver. Like the prodigal son, having realized what we have missed and the more suffering ahead if we fail to go back to our father, we should take the bold step to speedily run back to God and ask for pardon. Sure He will not hesitate to grant us pardon since Christ Himself has said that He has come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance. Christ added, 'for the Kingdom of God is close at hand. Yes there is no need for any further delay for that could be very dangerous and detrimental to our salvation. Who is sure of what could happen the moment? On realization of his mistakes, a wise man. Postponement is not a sign of true repentance.