

Homily for the First Sunday of Lent – Year A

Readings: Genesis 2:7-9 3: 1-7, Corinthians 5: 12-19, Matthew 4: 1-11



Fr Michael says:

Jesus in the Desert

Deserts are challenging and difficult places, loneliness and isolation can be extreme! No wonder they are privileged places for meeting God! The scenes depicted in today's Readings are not to be taken literally as true – they are there for our reflection – to make a point. Essentially Jesus is the New Adam, who conquers despite all obstacles: He over comes temptation, He has time to step back and see things as they are. Lent is our time for doing the same thing!

How can we live our lives fully as Christians in today's Society? We are invited to look at where we are before God, with ourselves and others and how can we move forward! If Lent is only a time for doing penance, then we are wrong! There is more to it than that!

One winter's day, a young man went to see a Rabbi to discuss his call to becoming one himself. As the student was talking about his piety and learning - the Rabbi looked out of his window. The student was saying "I only drink water; I dress in white like the wise men of old; as penance, I put nails in my shoes, roll naked in the snow to control my flesh and use the lash every day!" At that moment, a stable boy brought out a white horse to drink and who then rolled in the snow for pleasure. The Rabbi said: "This horse only drinks water, has nails in his hooves; rolls naked in the snow and feels the whip when he is being ridden. Is that horse a saint or only a horse?"

In other words, penances are not ends in themselves; they are not to undo the past – that has gone; it is not to ask God to erase sins and so forgo deserved punishment. We simply recognise ourselves as sinners – penance showing our desire to change. Penance is help us reform sinful ways of living, we can do better! This is what we really want! For this we need God's grace to see our better side; it is taking a step in the right direction. We are helped to live a new and better life (we can compare this to the pruning process for fruit trees) If we only stick with penances – even severe ones - then it is not easy for us to change our lives sincerely.

Where are we in this journey? Lent gives us the chance to find out – penances are means of pruning ourselves to bear more and even better fruit, by removing that which drains our energy. The cost entailed in pruning we can turn to growing and maturing and being fully part of the Vine, to which we are grafted through Jesus in the gift of Himself to us. In other words – penance must lead to action on our part: to live Jesus' Risen life fully! Such is our glorious calling refreshed through our Journey through Lent!



Fr Jean-Marie says:

Theme: A call to fight against temptations.

On Ash Wednesday, we received the ashes on our heads to mark the beginning of Lent. One of the formulas or words that the priest uses during the imposition of the ashes is: "Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return." In this formula we recall that our bodies bear the imprint of the first creation when they were fashioned from dust in reference to the story in the book of Genesis in our today's first reading. It is a reminder of the frailty, the brittleness and brevity of our human life at the end of which we shall all return to the earth.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, this year, in the first reading from the book of Genesis we begin Lent with the story of the fall of our first parents who disobeyed the word of God by eating the forbidden fruit. The author shows that people have always been tempted to make themselves their own gods, absolute masters of their own life and happiness. This makes us aware of our own sinfulness. Temptations are facts of life but they are not a sin in themselves. The great sin of Adam and Eve is that they gave in to the temptation. Since the time our first parents rebelled against the Lord we always have to deal with the tendency to turn away from God. That is why every year the Church reminds us to turn away from our ways and to turn back to God.

In the second reading Adam and Eve stand for all the fallen humanity. They have spoiled the right relationship with God, other people and themselves. God's Son, the man Jesus Christ, came to restore this broken relationship. Paul reminds us that it is through the death of Jesus that we all have been saved. Each year we come back to the Lord to renew our commitment to love him and our brothers and sisters.

In the Gospel we see Jesus – truly man like us – being tempted by the devil while fasting in the wilderness. He resists these temptations because of his adherence to the word of God and because of his faith in God. Jesus was tempted and he overcame all our human temptations of selfishness, pride and power. He wanted to serve God and save people. In this way he made us capable of humbly serving God and our neighbour.

During this time of Lent, we are called to look into ourselves and to see what keeps us from being free to serve and love God and people the way we should. We are called on in the readings to be faithful to God, to trust him at all times, and to call on Christ who knows what it is to be tempted. Let us make an effort to overcome temptations which come our way and keep us away from God. Amen.