

## Homily of First Sunday of Lent Year A, 2023

### Genesis 2:7-9, 3:1-7; Psalm 51:3-6, 12-13, 17; Romans 5:12-19; Matthew 4:1-11

The first reading tells us the story of the temptation and the fall of Adam and Eve. The gospel reading is about the temptation of Jesus and his triumph over Satan. If Satan tempted Adam and Eve, who lacked nothing, how much more will you and I who face all kinds of difficulties day in and day out? If Satan had the courage to tempt Jesus, who is God, who then, are we, mortal human beings, to escape Satan's temptation?

Someone says, "To be human is to be tempted." St. Ignatius calls Satan "the enemy of our human nature." We all will continue to encounter temptations until our last breath. Satan acknowledged in Job 1:7 that he/she is always "Roaming the earth and patrolling it." That is why the Scripture instructs us, "Be sober and vigilant. Your opponent, the devil, is prowling around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in faith..." (1 Peter 5:8-9).

Today, we are presented with the way Adam and Eve handled their temptation and the way Jesus handled his temptation. The two ways can help us understand Satan's tricks and be better prepared against our numerous temptations.

Adam and Eve abandoned God's good spirits of obedience and self-content and accepted Satan's bad spirits of disobedience, greed, desire for power, and desire for fame. Satan said to Eve, "No, God knows well that the moment you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like gods who know what is good and what is evil." The woman saw that the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eyes, and the tree was desirable for gaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate it; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it" (Genesis 3:5-6). "The Lord God therefore banished [them] from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which [they] had been taken. He expelled [them], stationing the cherubim and the fiery revolving sword east of the garden of Eden, to guard the way to the tree of life" (3:23-24). Disobedience, greed, desire for possessions, desire for power, and desire for fame have led many people astray and have led many people to their graves!

In Luke 12:15, Jesus says, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions."

One of the reasons for the fall of Adam and Eve is that Eve dialoged and reasoned with Satan. To overcome Satan and his/her temptations, we must avoid dialoging and reasoning with him/her. We must avoid occasions of sin. St. Paul warns, "Do not be deceived: Bad Company corrupts good morals" (1 Corinthians 15:33). "Do not give the devil any opportunity to work" (Ephesians 4:27).

In the gospel, Satan tempted Jesus after his time of prayer and fasting in the desert. At that time, he was hungry. Jesus was humanly in need. Satan said to Jesus, "If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become loaves of bread."

Sometimes, it is through what we lack that Satan tempts us. At those times, Satan plants in us ungodly means of finding solutions to our problem. In times of plenty (as in the case of Adam and Eve), or in times of need (as in the case of Jesus), we must be watchful and observant and resist Satan. St. James says, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).

In the three temptations, Jesus triumphed because he rejected disobedience, greed, desire for possessions, desire for power, desire for fame, and idolatry. Jesus refused to dialogue and reason with Satan. Rather, Jesus drove Satan away, "Get away, Satan!"

Jesus stood on the word of God: "One does not live by bread alone, but on every word that comes forth from the mouth of God" (Deuteronomy 8:3). "You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test" (Deuteronomy 6:16). "The Lord, your God, you shall worship and him alone shall you serve" (Deuteronomy 6:13). These are words with power and authority! Are you armed with the word of God, or are you bereft of the word of God? A Christian who is lacking in the word of God is a weak Christian.

The Igbo of Nigeria (the race I belong to) call Satan "Ekwensu," meaning, the one who brings crises if cooperated with. "Ekwe" means "cooperate with," "nsu" means "crises." We know the crises Satan brought to Adam and Eve when they cooperated with him/her and we know, also, the crises Satan brings to us when we cooperate with him/her.

Today, our attention is drawn to seven major areas through which Satan tempts us. They are disobedience, greed, desire for possessions, desire for power, desire for fame, worship of material things (modern-day idolatry), and reasoning and cooperating with Satan.

It is very revealing that it is through obedience, self-content, and the word of God that Jesus drove Satan away. Although to be human is to be tempted, we can always drive Satan away if we imitate Jesus. When we have done what we can as human beings, we put our trust in God's word in 1 Corinthians 10:13 that assures us, "God is faithful, and he will not let [us] be tempted beyond [our] ability, but with the temptation he will provide the way of escape, that [we] may be able to endure it." Amen.

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