

March 10, 2019 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent

This is our first Sunday of Lent, once again we arrive at this season. The gospel talks about Jesus's own Lenten experience; the 40 days He wrestled with temptation in the desert. Traditionally during Lent, we give up things, we do something extra, and so on. All this is good but I think and I suggest that this Lent we go deeper and get to the heart of what we need to do. The heart of our Lent will be the same as Jesus's wrestling with temptation. Now I'm not talking about ordinary temptations like Helen, who decided to fast and lose 20 pounds during Lent. On the third day Helen stopped at a café for coffee. At the table next to her a man sat down with a cup of coffee and two Crispy Cream donuts. They looked very tempting, but she did not order one. The man got up from his table, walked off leaving his second donut untouched. Helen sat there looking at the donut considering whether she should take it or not. Finally, she just reached over, took the donut and began to eat it; just as the man came back with his second cup of coffee. That's ordinary temptation.

What I'm talking about is our basic temptation, just as Jesus went through basic temptation in the desert and His temptation was very very real. For hundreds of years the Jewish people waited for their messiah. They were an oppressed people, they were stepped on, persecuted, exiled. When would their suffering end? Psalm 13 asks, "How long oh Lord? How long will you hide your face from us? How long will our enemy triumph over us?" Patiently they waited for their messiah to deliver them from oppression. They knew their messiah would be a powerful king, and bring them back to glory. When their messiah came, they could once again hold their heads up high. But of course our ways are not God's ways. God wanted His son to be a servant of all. He would be a suffering messiah who would die a horrible failure, nailed to a cross. This is just the opposite of what everybody wanted. So what was Jesus's basic temptation? Show your power by turning stone into bread. Jump off this tower and see if you get hurt. Take as your own all the power and glory of this world. Do you see the temptation in there? The temptation is this: Jesus, be the person everybody wants you to be, be the hero they expect. Everyone will applaud and cheer you. These people won't accept anything else so don't disappoint them. Jesus, don't do this, do what you need to do to be popular. Jesus's basic temptation was to be the person everybody wanted him to be, not the person God called him to be. I believe our basic temptation is the same as Jesus': To be someone other than what God calls us to be. To meet the expectations others have of us, and to be someone less than God wants us to be

What does God want for us? We know in our hearts that God wants us to be our best. To be wholehearted people, be 100 percenters, and to follow Jesus sometimes in heroic ways. But, our temptation is to settle for less. We know we are not yet 100 percenters. We know that God is calling us to more but we hesitate to respond. We're not willing to risk what responding might mean so, we settle for less. We leave well enough alone. We say, "You know what? I'm not such a bad person, everything in moderation, I'll settle for getting into heaven and that's enough." You know what? Some people say, "I don't want to be a saint." But, you can't get into heaven without being a saint. So we have to think, wait a minute, you're settling for heaven? I hear people tell me, "I'm going to settle for purgatory, Father." I look at them and I say, "What if you don't make that? That's why settling for heaven has got to be the best we can do. The only sadness in life is not to be a saint.

So, this Lent, I'm challenging everyone including myself, let's make it really count. Let's deal with the big picture. Our basic temptation to be less than God calls us. Let's, like Jesus, take up wrestling this Lent, and come to Easter changed people, because we have accepted the challenge.

God bless you.