

## LENT 1 Year A

Lent is a time that God lends to us to sort out our soul: a time to clean up some issues, to root out our vices, to tidy up our behaviour and become a better person.

The forty days of Lent, beginning with Ash Wednesday and leading up to Palm Sunday, which ushers in Holy Week, involves an unusual ceremony of the priest imposing ashes on one's forehead with the stark reminder of one's mortality. Yes, Lent is a sombre time.

On that day of ashes, Christ in the Gospel inspires us in three aspects: almsgiving, prayer and fasting. These spiritual domains build up our faith, hope and charity. Often the third aspect of fasting or self discipline of the body receives most notoriety: "What are you giving up for Lent?" "I gave up chocolate and sugar in my tea." As a child I can still vividly recall how difficult it was to give up lollies during this season. Sometimes even a glass 'lolly' jar would appear on the kitchen bench as a safe receptacle for any stray lollies lest one break their pledge. Admittedly the sight of the jar did strengthen our resolve as children. Today, apart from the normal denial of sweets and other delights one could abstain from technology. The wilful disconnect from the ipad or phone for lengthy periods would be advantageous and certainly enhance communication.

The 'giving up' during Lent ought not to smother the 'taking-up' concerning the works of mercy and prayer. There is ample need to manifest love of neighbour in our society. Even just the random visit to a sick person would be most beneficial. The Stations of the Cross is a superb practice worthy of much consideration on a Friday evening. Not to forget, of course, adoration at the Chapel and the holy Rosary.

Amid these spiritual exercises of prayer, fasting and almsgiving let us be mindful of temptations. The Gospel this weekend on the three temptations of Christ was written for us and displays the three temptations that we all endure at some stage. When I say, written for us, I mean for us, the story was told by Jesus for our sakes. For no disciples were present at that time, indeed there were no eyewitnesses, at these events. The conveying of the story, therefore, was for our sake so that when we are tempted we might have his example to follow.

First of all, temptations are not sins. Only when an evil temptation is fully consented to have we sinned. Daily a myriad of images and feelings invades our thoughts and imagination. We are frail human beings with limitations especially when our bodies are tired or spent. Often at such times we are more vulnerable to the prick or pick of sin within. Yet if knowledge was lacking and will withheld we have not sinned. On the other hand, if we are toying with temptations, surfing certain net sites, teasing our siblings, drinking in excess, then we are playing with fire and eventually will be burnt.

Satan tempts Christ and uses Scripture to advance his cause. The devil will employ good tactics and tools to bring you down. He tempts Jesus when his body is exhausted from fasting with a miracle of bread making. He tempts Jesus with glory if he will show his miraculous powers. He tempts Jesus with greed – that is not his own to give – with the wealth of the world. In each case he presents a lie – for is he not a liar. In each case the Author of truth rebuts his words with the Words of truth.

When we are tempted what is proposed will appear as a good. But take a reality check on what is being offered. Effort is required to uncover lies. Sort the facts from the fantasy. A lie is the absence

of truth. It takes only a few drops of poison to ruin an elixir of life. Eve's mind was poisoned once she began to doubt what God has said: "You will not die, will you?" Had she not entertained that doubt she would not have believed the lie and the want of power – to be like God – would not have entered her heart.

What is proposed as a good may actually be good. But not good for us, or not good here and now or it may be good but not what is the best for us. All saints had to fight temptations, and they won that's why they are saints. Take, for example, St Francis Xavier, he was tempted for years to become a missionary and that is a good thing. But St Ignatius would not send him, he needed him in Rome. It was not the right time. So he had to be patient until that time came. Saint John Vianney was tempted to leave his parish and become a hermit. Being a prayerful hermit is a good thing but not for him. Three times he gave in to the temptation but afterwards returned. Late in life he realised that God's will was for him to remain in his parish. Saint Catherine of Sienna was tempted not to follow the pope to Rome but wanted to return to Sienna, her home town, which is a good thing but not the best. God clarified the matter and she went and died there.

When we are assailed by temptations seek guidance. Don't let them linger but consult someone that you admire, whose advice is trustworthy and reveal to him or her the matter at hand. In addition, go to Confession and ask the priest for his counsel and upon receiving Holy Communion seek the strength and grace of this sublime Sacrament to overcome the temptation at hand. It is in the struggle that we practise virtue which makes us holy and finally, remember, that we are never alone for do we not pray? Lead us not into temptation.