



First Week of Lent

Fr. Josh Miller / March 12th, 2011

The Temptation in the Desert. Jesus wanders in the desert for forty days and forty nights as a kind of retreat, a get-away, in order to prepare himself for his public ministry. He's preparing himself to do what he has come to do, what the Father in Heaven has sent His Son to do. He comes to fulfill his purpose, to live out who He is.

But then he meets the Tempter, the Devil. And the Devil presents him with all of these things he could do to better his situation in the present moment, or for a future of comfort and security.

Remember: Jesus came into the desert in the first place to prepare to live out exactly who he is, but in this encounter with the Evil One, when you get right down to it, what the Evil One is saying is, "Become *less* than what you are."

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I had the pleasure [*today/yesterday*] to witness the confirmations of our eighth graders, and it was a great day. As I was watching them being confirmed, I couldn't help but think about the great responsibility they receive through the Sacrament of Confirmation to live out their baptismal commitment with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. I had a chance to talk with the eighth graders and their parents last week, and our gospel today reminds me of one of the major points I had to share with them.

That point has to do with how much the world sells us short. How much it constantly insults us with that same message of the Evil One. For a young kid, or for a young Catholic, it has to be insulting to constantly hear how little the world thinks you capable of.

You know, I've shared a lot of stories from my youth (which some of you will remind me I'm still in, and rightly so), but now I want to share a more serious realization from that period. Things haven't changed much from when I was a teenager, and I remember shaking my head more than once about the world's perception of me.

Its perception was that because I was a kid, I was going to fail; and because I was going to fail, society has a responsibility to structure itself around my failure. But what it absolutely could not do – because certainly, I wasn't capable of it in society's eyes – what it *could not do* was call me to greatness, to virtue. Since the world deemed that greatness was not possible for me, it wasn't even going to bother calling me to it. That's insulting, and it's with that same kind of disgust that Jesus vanquishes Satan in our Gospel: he's disgusted with him, and wants nothing to do with him, because Satan has called him into a malignant sense of mediocrity: *you want food, here it is. You want power, pleasure, wealth, honor, here it is.* It's immediate and in the moment, like the animal who wanders from moment to moment without the ability to control itself.

But somewhere around my 20's, I began to understand the beauty of what God says, the beauty of what God provides and offers us with each and every breath. Whereas the Father of Lies tells us to be satisfied with our mediocrity, to become *less* than what we are, Our Father in Heaven simply calls us to "Become *what we are.*"

God knows what he made us to be. He knows what we're capable of. He looks at each one of us and sees that intrinsic beauty which can only come from being made in His

image. God looks at us and sees the fullness of what he made us to be.

And that's one reason I love Lent, why it's so beautiful. Christ provides us this time through his Bride, the Church, to pause, to reflect on how we've sold ourselves short. This past Wednesday, many of us received ashes on our foreheads marking us as sinners, ones who have at times bought into the lies from ourselves, from the world, or from the Tempter.

But there's hope. There's always hope. The reason we mark ourselves with ashes within the context of the celebration of the Mass, and the reason we don't just have services where you come get the ashes and leave, and the reason we don't just set up shop at the train station as one church I heard about did, is because of hope. We acknowledge through the ashes that we are all sinners in need of conversion, but God doesn't just leave it at that. After we receive the ashes, we receive the Eucharist, the antidote to the poison of sin and death we mark through the ashes. The Church knows through the Holy Spirit that if you were to all just come in and receive the ashes but the Church didn't offer you the Most Holy Eucharist, it's akin to saying, "I know you're poisoned!... but you don't really need the antidote."

And yet, we realize we do need that antidote. Lent prepares us to approach the Eucharist, the answer and solution to sin and death, with more fervent joy, since the Eucharist is the direct result of the Passion and Death of Our Lord we so highly honor in this season. As we turn to the table of the Lord today, as we enter in to that *very moment* where Christ was sacrificed for all of us, let us look to that help Christ offers us through his Body and Blood, resolving to come into the fullness of who we really are rather than the lies that tell us who we are *not*.