

## Homily for 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent, Year A

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Readings: Gen 2:7-9, 3:1-7; Ps 50(51); Rom 5:12-19; Matt 4:1-11

Theme: Combating Temptation!

Genesis chapter one gives us a panoramic view of the creation of the human being. Our reading today gives details of how the human being was created. He was fashioned from the dust of the ground. In Hebrew, it sounds fascinating. God created Adam from the dust of Adamah. So, there is a relationship between Adam, humanity and from where he was created, Adamah, the ground. The human being was lifeless and mere dust until God breathed the breath of life into his nostrils, and Adam became a living nephesh, a living soul or being. God then put this human being in the garden of Eden with trees of every kind pleasant to the eyes and good for food. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was also in the garden.

The Genesis creation story tells us that the human being was created in a state of original innocence, knowing only the good that God had presented to them. However, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was there before them. They had the freedom to eat every tree in the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The Serpent, described as, in Hebrew, arum, shrewd or crafty, came to the woman asking if God had asked them not to eat of any tree in the garden. The woman said God asked them to eat of trees except for the one in the middle, which they must not eat or touch under pain of death. The crafty Serpent then told the woman that she would not die and that God knew that the day they ate of it, their eyes would be open to knowing good and evil and become like God. The action of the Serpent is what we call temptation.

The Greek word *πειρασμός* (*peirasmos*) in scripture could be seen in three different ways. First, it could be a way of God's examination of the human being. In this case, it means 'test or trial.' (cf. 1 Pet 4:12). Second, it could be an enticement to sin from within the person or outside the person. We call that temptation or testing. That was what the devil did to Jesus. He was enticing Jesus to sin against God, his father (cf. Matt 4:1-11; Lk 22:40). Finally, it could be the human being putting God to the test (cf. Heb 3:8; Ps 95:9). The Serpent was only enticing the woman to sin.

The woman was indeed enticed to look at the tree more intently. She saw it was good for food (bodily satisfaction). It was pleasing to the eye (the quest for acquisition) and desirable for knowledge (the pride of life, the desire to know everything). She could not resist the temptation. She ate and gave some to her husband, who was beside her. He, too, ate, and their eyes were opened. They realised their nakedness. They had died to their innocence because they could not withstand the temptation.

St. Paul tells us this was how sin and death came into the world, a death that has now spread throughout the human race. In the beginning, there was strictly no law given to Adam and Eve. However, the inability of the first man and woman to withstand temptation and the subsequent fall of humanity into various sins necessitated the law. The law was given through Moses to distinguish between good and evil and help God's children resist and combat sin and evil. Still, the human mind was unable to withstand temptation. Jesus will reverse the ancient fall and teach us how to fight the crafty ancient Serpent.

In the gospel, that same ancient Serpent comes with the same craftiness to entice Jesus to sin. The Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness for the sole purpose of being tempted. This action of Jesus was deliberate to teach us how to withstand the devil. We, too, are not immune to temptation. Jesus prepared himself for the temptation. He fasted for forty days and forty nights. Fasting helps us discipline the body. It denies the body some pleasure to make the spirit alert to God. However, the devil knows when to attack and tempts us in our strengths and weaknesses. The tempter observed that Jesus was hungry and capitalised on that weakness. He

asked him to turn stones into bread to satisfy his hunger. But Jesus would not do the bidding of the devil. He would rather mortify the flesh and stay strong in the Spirit.

The devil then wanted him to prove his strength since he could not use Jesus' weakness against him. He then wanted Jesus to demonstrate his power by throwing himself from the pinnacle of the temple. Jesus would not fall to the temptation of pride. That would be doing the bidding of the devil. Finally, he showed Jesus the kingdoms and glories of this world, demanding that Jesus worship him to have everything back. That was probably the strongest temptation for Jesus. Jesus had come into the world to reclaim what Adam and Eve willingly gave to the Ancient Serpent through the fall. Satan promises to return everything to Jesus on a platter of gold without him going to the cross to suffer. Again, Jesus would instead go the way of suffering and pain than do the devil's bidding. He is content with the will of the father. How often do we like to take the easy road? And in taking the easy route, we do things that are inimical to our faith and God's word?

Notice that in all temptations, Jesus did not speak except by quoting the scriptures. To face temptations, we must know the scripture and use it appropriately. However, notice that the devil quoted back the scripture at Jesus to confuse him. But the key is Jesus knows the difference between the voice of God and the voice of the devil. Whenever the voice wants us to prove our strength instead of relying on God or doing something extraordinary to attract praise and attention from human beings, there is pride, ego and selfish interest. We can easily spot the devil's voice in pride, power, and selfish interest.