

1st Sunday of Lent, 2008

““And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterwards He was hungry.”
(Matthew 4:2)

Christ, the new Adam, triumphant over temptation, treads under foot the serpent which deceived our first parents; and the Angels come to minister to Him. On this Sunday which was formerly the first day of Lent, the Station at Rome was held at St John Lateran, which is dedicated to Our Lord under the title of St Saviour's. The scene of the temptation, which opens the public life of Jesus, declares in the Gospels in a very forceful manner the great change in our lives that He introduces into the world by His work of redemption. Where Adam fell, Christ, the new Head of humanity, triumphs over the



power of Satan: at the time of the Passion “the prince of this world” will be cast out. The Gospel of the temptation heralds Christ's victory in advance. The Church proclaims that this victory should be ours also. In us, all around us, it is Christ's temptation, Christ's struggle, Christ's victory which is prolonged; our effort is His and so is our strength; He will be our victory at Easter. Thus we should enter confidently on the struggle whose course is traced out for us by St Paul in today's Epistle. It means a renewal should be encouraged by the thought that increase of Christian life in each of us is a continuance of Christ's victory.

Our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XIV, in speaking of the temptations of Christ and His war against the devil which will go on to the end of time, makes this interesting statement:

The Apostles' Creed speaks of Jesus' "descent into hell". This descent not only took place in and after His death, but accompanies Him along His entire journey. He must recapitulate the whole of history from its beginnings — from Adam on; He must go through, suffer through the whole of it in order to transform it. The Epistle to the Hebrews is particularly eloquent in stressing that Jesus' mission., the solidarity with all of us that He manifested beforehand in His Baptism, includes exposure to the risks and perils of human existence: "Therefore He had to be made like His brethren in every respect, so that He might become a merciful and faithful High Priest in the service of God, to make expiation for the sins of the people. For because He himself has suffered and been tempted He is able to help those who are tempted."¹

¹ Heb. 21: 17-18

“For we have not a High Priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.”²

As the living Word of God tells us through St Paul, the days of Lent are days of salvation; more than any, Lent is the “acceptable time” to amend our lives. Notice especially St Paul’s admonition in his Epistle today: “In watchings, in fastings, in chastity, in knowledge (of Christ and Heavenly things), in suffering, in sweetness, in the Holy Ghost, in charity unfeigned, in the word of truth, in the power of God...”³ The Church emphasises this so that at Easter with souls and bodies purified we may celebrate the mystery of the Passion and Resurrection of our Lord. The Mass begins with those encouraging words: “He that dwelleth in the aid of the Most High shall abide under the protection of the God of Heaven.”

What then shall we do? I ask all those who have a Daily Missal to read the whole of each Mass, each day — and ask yourself, “Am I actually doing what God is saying to me through the prayers and scriptures of the Mass?” Take for instance the prayer of Saturday: “Hearken Lord to our supplications, and grant that in a spirit of duty and religion, we may keep this solemn fast which Thou hast beneficently ordained for the healing of souls and bodies. Through Christ our Lord.” There is no doubt that Jesus Himself ordained the fast; that He consecrated it by His own example suffering on our behalf; now it is for us “in a spirit of duty and religion” to observe these forty holy days in love and gratitude to our Saviour in whom we can place all our cares.

Give more of the time God has given you back to Him. Sacrifice a half hour of sleep a day — and spend it in some way in union with Our Lord in His mysteries. Renew the habit of making the sign of the Cross as soon as you wake in the morning. Renew devotion to the mysteries of the Passion through the Stations of the Cross — making them wherever the Stations have been canonically erected; seeking for oneself the grace of true repentance and having the positive intention of giving good example to others. Children love the Stations of the Cross; and parents must take their duty of teaching them about Lent — and about the traditional devotions of Lent so that they learn always to desire to be pleasing to our Lord.

Sister Lucia of Fatima writes:

Parents are the ones who must guide their children’s first steps to the altar of God, teaching them to raise their innocent hands and to pray, helping them to discover how to find God on their way and to follow the echo of His voice. This is the most serious and important mission that has been entrusted by God to parents; and they must fulfil it so well that, throughout their lives, the memory of their parents will always arouse in their children the memory of God and of His teaching. It is from childhood that they must grow into intimacy with the Child Jesus; a friendship which will increase and grow strong, growing with Him in a love that is deeply heart-felt when they follow the long story of His love for them even to the sufferings of His Passion and

² Heb. 4:15

³ 2 Cor. 6:5–6

death in which He willingly offered Himself for love of them to keep them pure and holy in His sight.

And where better to learn about this than at the school of Mary, His blessed Mother; Jesus learned His childhood lessons at her knees; now as her children we must open our hearts to her teaching — for who is the most wonderful example of the Love of Christ, but herself who stood at the foot of the Cross. No! She did not swoon or show any weakness; but stood firm with her Immaculate Heart perfectly one in love and suffering with her divine Son, for all of us.

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