

## First Sunday of Lent

February 26, 2023

Well, we are off and running. Another Lent has come our way. There is a certain fascination many of us have with Lent. Maybe that fascination is mostly centered on what we received a few days ago - ashes. What a unique and powerful (and maybe even a little macabre) sign - one that gets us thinking about some pretty uncomfortable things.

Or maybe our fascination is with the fasting and abstinence that is asked of us on certain days. After all, that's something that just feels so unique about us Catholic. And of course, most of us have a fascination with "giving something up". But the question is will I be able to "accomplish" whatever it is I have pledged to "do", or will I mess up? Yes, Lent sure does capture our imagination.

Yet, I forgot to mention what maybe fascinates us the most, something we often don't talk about, but is present nonetheless. I'm talking about the realization that we're not even close to being perfect, that we can be so much better, that we know deep down that we have disappointed ourselves and probably God as well. In other words, the whole season of Lent is a somewhat

painful reminder to each of us that we have all contributed to the world not being quite the way God wants it to be. And that's partly my fault. And yours as well. A sobering thought.

We just heard the story of how our first parents started the ball rolling, how they first decided to do something that seemed to contradict what God wanted, acted in their own interests rather than God's, how they listened to other voices rather than the authentic voice inside, how they failed to listen to their God who was the only one who truly knew what was best for them. And of course, the serpent presented the nudge to them that provided the tipping point.

And what was that tipping point, that nudge, that voice they couldn't seem to resist? It was the deceptive voice that said . . . . There is something better out there.

We sometimes think that the wrong we do is just that, "bad things" that we somehow want to embrace anyway. But think about that statement for a moment. If we truly thought something was bad for us (or better yet, KNEW that it was bad), how many of us would choose it anyway? Some, of course. After all, some of the acts

humans choose are truly hard to understand. In fact, some really abominable things are almost certainly the product of mental illness and other such things, but that's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about the other 99% of the wrong we do. Do we really choose those things because we know they are bad for us and others, and we simply want spread misery and pain and injustice? I beg to differ.

The truth is many things we do that are considered "wrong" actually involve us choosing things that are "good" in some respect or to some degree. These are things that in the moment somehow seem to be the "better thing out there" that the serpent dangled in front of Adam and Eve. We, unfortunately, often choose these other things, these "lesser" goods instead of choosing the "greatest" good.

And so, we cheat on a test because it seems better that we graduate than have wasted our tuition money. Or we steal something because we probably need it more than the next guy (or store or government). Or we gossip about someone because others deserve to have the whole picture (and a bonus, we will look better in the process). Or we start running with a bad crowd because

it's better to have some support from anyone we can find rather than have none at all. Or we spend excessive time at the office (and neglect our family in the process) because we can always use more money. Or we misuse substances because feeling numb is better than what we were feeling before. Or we cheat on a spouse because it temporarily makes us forget the discord at home. Yes, there is always something better out there.

And that's the BIG LIE. That's what gets us into trouble. That's the ORIGINAL SIN, the one that says we know better, that our way is the best way, that God places unrealistic expectations on us. It's the lie in which we find ourselves saying . . .

God, I hear what you're saying, but . . .

And from that small word, but comes so much pain, so much disharmony, so many blunders, so many lost opportunities to help make this world the beautiful place God created it to be and died for it to be.

And that's why we have Lent, to help us break that cycle, to help us realize that God's way is always the best way. Even Jesus prayed that the cup would pass him by, but in

the end, surrendered to what the Father wanted and, well, saved the world in the process.

So let's look deep within and examine the areas of our lives in which we don't choose the best option, areas we don't listen to the wisest voice. And let's use the holy practices of Lent, prayer, fasting, and almsgiving to help us see clearly just how much God loves us, how completely dependent we are on him, and how simply choosing what we want can never be better than choosing what God wants. Have a blessed Lent everyone.

### **A Short Story**

The dentist's office is full of very expensive and sophisticated equipment. The high-tech gadgetry helps him to monitor possible problems with any one's teeth and treat whatever problems may arise with greater precision and less pain for each. But there's one dental-health issue that all the fancy equipment can't address: the results of not flossing daily. Standing in the middle of all that equipment, the dentist told his patient: "There's no substitute for running that piece of floss between your teeth." It's hard to believe that an action so simple can have such great effect. There's no substitute for flossing,

and there's no substitute for praying and reading scripture daily. Dear God, help us learn to do the things that will bring us closer to you in the season of Lent. Amen.