

LENT 1, A – March 1, 2020
SCRIPTURES – Genesis 3:1-21; Romans 5:12-17; Matthew 4:1-11

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?"... (Gen. 3) Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. (Matt. 4)

What do we learn from today's readings? Let's see... that diets have always been hard to keep? I mean: Adam and Eve had only one thing, one fruit, forbidden to them... and they still couldn't keep away from it!

God is concerned with far more important things than your diet, and He teaches us far more important things in His Scriptures than what you should or shouldn't eat. He teaches that it is His will that your faith be challenged, be tested. God will test you. He has done so from the beginning.

Really? Yes! If God did not want to test and challenge Adam and Eve, He would not have put in Eden a tree from which they were not to eat. Nor would He have allowed the devil to disguise himself as a serpent and tempt them. And Jesus – the perfect man, the second Adam: He would not have been led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness, to there face devil. It is God's will that faith – including your faith – be tested!

Now, perhaps this makes you wonder: what kind of a God is He, that He tests me and allows me to be challenged? Well, if you focus upon all that He does for you and freely gives to you, you'll see Him as good – a good Father – and rejoice in Him.

- Adam and Eve lived in a garden of great beauty and variety and abundance. They had so much to see and taste and enjoy and gladden the heart. And all were God's gifts to them! If they had focused upon this, they would only have seen God as good; as full of joy and loving.

Focus on God's good gifts, and even when He tests you, you'll believe that He has good in mind for you.

But, if you fix your eyes and your heart upon what you do not have and are not to have... well, then God will seem to be different. This is why the devil drew Adam's and Eve's attention to the fruit they had been forbidden to eat. **"Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?"** No, He hadn't actually said that, as Eve tells him. But, with the word "actually", the devil raises doubt. *"Did he actually, really, say that? Why wouldn't he want you to have something that is so obviously good?"*

Unlike God, who challenges and tests you to lead you to rely on Him, and in this way strengthen your faith, the devil only desires to weaken your faith and, finally, snuff it out and bring you to hell. He is a skilled deceiver. He works to draw your attention to things that you should not have, that are bad for you or forbidden to you. He would have them not only before your eyes, but in your mind and heart.

Now, seeing as, since Adam's and Eve's fall into sin, sin and death afflict us all – we're born under their power, and so the desire to satisfy ourselves and rule ourselves fills our hearts – the devil often tempts us with things that are obviously bad, like pornography. But, he also tempts us with things that are good, that are God's... such as His Word. If he used it against Jesus he will use it against you! *"Use God's Word the way you want, to support your desires,"* he whispers. *"If it challenges you and makes you uncomfortable, find a different meaning to it."* And so, to Eve he says, ***"If you eat, you will not die, but you will be like God. Now: why doesn't he want that?"*** To Jesus he says, ***"If you are the Son of God, as God said at your baptism... well, why are you starving? What kind of a Father would lead his son into a barren wilderness? Look: you can make these stones into bread and take care of yourself, can't you?"*** See how the devil uses the holy words and gifts of God. He twists them, and then tempts you with them.

When you hear or read God's Word don't ever let the devil, or anyone!, make you doubt that God is good. You won't if you hold to its plain and simple meaning! Then you will truly know God and see His goodness. For, you see, ever since Adam and Eve fell into sin, God is a hidden God. He doesn't appear visibly to us – except for when Jesus came, of course. But, even then He was hidden. Except for the occasional times when He did a miracle Jesus lived as a normal human being. He hid His glory. He accepted this as His Father's good will. ***"It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God,'"*** He said to the devil, and so did not miraculously turn a stone into bread. The Son of God Himself followed what God says in the Bible! He did not listen to a different voice, not even one in His mind or His heart. If Jesus, who is holy, didn't listen to any other voice, you must not either! Beware especially the hidden voice in the heart. It is the voice, the whisper, of the devil! Listen to God's plain and simple words in the Bible, and believe them. You then have God with you to help you and save you!

Today we see, right at the beginning of the Bible, that our God is not an easy God, an always gentle Father. He tests His people! But, how different He is from the devil, the tempter, in this. See how He stands with His people and comes to their aid!

- First, He gave everything He had made to Adam and Eve. Only one thing was withheld. His gifts were incredible in their abundance! They are incredible to you, also – if you will only open your eyes to see!
- Then, when they disobeyed and ran from Him, He sought them out. There is mercy! And, when He found them, He gave them the opportunity to confess and repent. His anger and His sorrow gave way to His mercy!
- And, even when Adam made things worse by blaming Him – ***"The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate"*** – God did not respond in anger. Instead, He promised them a Savior, one who would deliver them by crushing the devil under His feet.

- He kept that promise by sending His only-begotten Son to us, and as one of us. In Jesus, the new Adam, we have the victory over the devil and the confirmation of the truth and the goodness of God's Word.

Such a good and kind and merciful Father is our God! Keep this foremost in your mind and heart, and when hardships come and your faith is tested, you will stand. He will hold you up and give you the victory!

God's love is never-ending, and it is yours in Jesus... always! In Jesus... who knows your life and your temptations, for He lived as you do in this world: under the will of God and so tested by God. In Jesus... who was tempted by the devil, as you are: and who overcame him with the same Word of God that you have. You have more, in fact. You have the record of Christ's complete victory over the devil, and also your sins and your death, by His holy life, His death for our sins, His glorious resurrection, and His ascension into heaven, from which He rules over all things for you. The message of this Jesus will not fail to give you the victory over the devil, no matter what his temptation! It will not fail to strengthen you and assure you of God's love when He tests you.

Let us pray: Blessed Lord, You have caused Your Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning. Grant that we may so hear them; read, mark, learn, and take them to heart; that by the patience and comfort of Your Holy Word we might stand in every trial and temptation, be united to and formed in Christ, and so be brought to everlasting life. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.