

1st (QA&SJ) Sunday of Lent Year B

A mother was teaching her three-year-old daughter *'The Lord's Prayer.'* For several evenings at bedtime she repeated it after her mother. One night she said she was ready to solo. The mother listened with pride as she carefully enunciated each word, right up to the end... *"And lead us not into temptation", she prayed, "but deliver us some e-mail. Amen."*

The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines temptation as an attraction, either from outside oneself or from within, to act contrary to right reason and the commandments of God. Temptation is an ever-present reality in our lives. No one of us is exempted from this warfare of good & evil every day. In the Synoptic Gospels the temptations of Jesus were clearly presented. Jesus, during his earthly life, was tempted, put to the test to manifest both the opposition between himself and the devil, and the triumph of his saving work over Satan.

The gospel tells how Jesus endures temptations in the desert and how he struggled to overcome them. After his baptism in the river Jordan *"The Spirit drove Jesus out into the desert, and he remained in the desert for forty days, tempted by Satan. He was among wild beasts, and the angels ministered to him."* The desert was the birthplace of the people of God. Where the Hebrew people, after they escaped from Egypt, were tempted & became one nation & people under God's fatherly care. When their love and faithfulness to God grew cold, as a

way of reawakening their faith and strengthening their covenant relationship with God, they return to the desert to rediscover their identity, their vocation, and their mission. The desert is like a school where God teaches His people. It is where Jesus came to distinguish between the voice of God that He should follow and the voice of Satan that he has to resist. It's in the desert that we also must focus on distinguishing between the guiding voice of God and the tempting voice of Satan.

In the desert Jesus encountered beasts and angels. There are wild beasts and angels in every one of us. We all have temptations. We all have weaknesses. *What are the "beasts" in your life? I got this beautiful text message last Ash Wednesday: "Fast on anger, feast on patience; fast on anxiety, feast on hope; fast on bitterness, feast on forgiveness. What are your struggles and battles with the forces of evil? For as long as a person lives temptation is experienced. Sometimes we take pride in ourselves, give into anger, to cheating, to excessive eating, drinking or gambling. As one proverb says, "Temptation, if not resisted, soon becomes a necessity." Like the way Jesus handled temptation we must say NO right from the start or flee, otherwise we get hooked—and go down to our destruction. Have you encountered a desert experience in your life? God allows and even leads us to the desert so that we can really listen to Him. When life is easy we often lose sight of God. But*

when life becomes dry, barren & empty, we really thirst for His presence and His love. One thing is sure: *God will not desert us in the desert.*

While Jesus was in the desert among the wild beasts, angels were also there to minister to Him. How reassuring to know that God will not leave us unaided. In the desert we come to know *ourselves, our strengths and weaknesses, and our divine calling.* Remember! Temptation often comes not at our strongest, but at our weakest moments. That is, *when we are at the limits of our patience or kindness. When we want to get even. When we are under pressure. When we think, just this once is okay.* So be on guard. Jesus' temptation began after 40 days of fasting. We need God's help to stop us from consenting to temptation and from falling into sin, because temptations can just spring up all of a sudden. In that moment of temptation, where fear and terror besiege us, we just have to reach out and have trust in God. When tempted we can always turn to the Lord in prayer. Not only do we pray, "*Lead us not into temptation,*" but also "*deliver us from evil*". We ask God to not allow us to *enter* and *yield* to temptation— but to give us the Spirit of discernment and will-power. *Remember Satan tries to limit your praying because he knows your praying will limit Him!*

The rule of thumb when tempted: Pray and flee! We may have gone through and have come out of the desert victorious, please don't be complacent and proud. *When fleeing the scene of temptation, do not leave a forwarding address!* The enemy never sleeps. As the book of

Psalm said, “*The devil is like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.*” Welcome to the season of Lent. Welcome to the desert! This is a special occasion, which calls us to deep decision-making. It challenges us to test our faithfulness to God and to rise above our human weaknesses. *Is temptation knocking? Let Jesus get the door!*

Certainly we should fear temptations, but then again, F-E-A-R can mean Forget-Everything-And-Run. Or it can also mean Face-Everything-And-Rise. It is for us to decide and choose. Jesus faced His temptations and rose with the truth. May we also face our temptations and realize that we do not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God. May we worship the Lord our God and serve Him alone. Let these be our resolutions and our decisions. May we find our power in Jesus! Amen.