

First Sunday of Lent, February 26, 2023

Our Lady of Perpetual Help

First Reading — Genesis 2:7-9; 3:1-7

7Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. 8 And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. 9And out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. ... 3:1 Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?'" 2 And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; 3but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" 4 But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die. 5For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." 6So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate. 7Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons.

Responsorial Psalm PS 51:3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 17

R. (cf. 3a) Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.

Have mercy on me, O God, in your goodness; in the greatness of your compassion wipe out my offense. Thoroughly wash me from my guilt and of my sin cleanse me.

R. Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.

For I acknowledge my offense, and my sin is before me always: "Against you only have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight."

R. Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.

A clean heart create for me, O God, and a steadfast spirit renew within me. Cast me not out from your presence, and your Holy Spirit take not from me.

R. Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned. Give me back the joy of your salvation, and a willing spirit sustain in me. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall proclaim your praise.

R. Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.

Second Reading — Romans 5:12-19

12Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned— 13sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. 14Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come. 15But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. 16 And the free gift is not like the effect of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. 17 If, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. 18Then as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men. 19For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous.

Gospel Reading — Matthew 4:1-11

1Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 And he fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was hungry. 3And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." 4But he answered, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'" 5Then the devil took him to the holy city, and set him on the pinnacle of the temple, 6and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will give his angels charge of you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'" 7Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'" 8Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; 9and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." 10Then

First Sunday of Lent, February 26, 2023

Our Lady of Perpetual Help

Jesus said to him, "Begone, Satan! for it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'" 11Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and ministered to him.

First Sunday of Lent, February 26, 2023

Our Lady of Perpetual Help

INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God...

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

Lent, the forty days and nights proceeding Easter, should be a meaningful time of preparation which we look forward to with anticipation. The early church saw these days as preparation not only for candidates presenting themselves for baptism, but also for the entire church. Lent can be a time of both sorrow and joy as we reflect on our humanity and on him who is the redeemer of our humanity. During Lent, as we read, pray, and reflect we often sadly recognize our hardness of heart, willful disobedience, and lukewarm devotion. This very recognition of our stained humanity should give us hope. As C.S. Lewis said, "It is when we notice the dirt that God is most present in us, it is the very sign of his presence." St. Francis de Sales tells of St. Catherine of Siena's struggle with temptation. "This temptation continued for a long time until our Lord one day appeared to her and she said to him, 'Where were you, my sweet Lord, when my heart was filled with such a great darkness and filth?' He answered, 'My daughter, I was within your heart.' 'But how could you dwell within my heart where there was so much impurity?' she asked, 'Is it possible that you could dwell in so foul a place?' Our Lord replied to her, 'Tell me, did the filthy thought within your heart bring you pleasure or gloom, grief or delight?' and she said, 'The very greatest grief and gloom.' He replied, 'Who placed this great grief and gloom in your heart but me who remained hidden in the very center of your soul? My daughter, believe me, if I had not been present there those thoughts which beset your will and which you could not drive away would certainly have conquered and entered into it. Once accepted with pleasure by your free will, they would have brought death to your soul. Since I was present within you, I put that displeasure and resistance in your heart and thus enabled it to reject the temptation as far as it could. When unable to do as much as it wanted to it felt still greater displeasure and dislike for both the temptation and for itself. Thus these trials have been a great source of merit and profit for you and have greatly increased your strength and virtue'"¹ This Sunday's Gospel reading gives us immense insight into the nature of temptation and the source of strength to overcome temptation. Someone, speaking of temptation has said, "We can't prevent the birds from flying overhead but we can prevent them from building a nest in our hair." So it is with temptation. We cannot prevent our soul from being subjected to temptation, it is part of the human drama. However, we don't need to surrender to it. Even Jesus, the Son of God was put to the test by Satan. Satan pulled out all the stops and appealed to all of man's senses and inner desires for self-preservation and glorification to tempt Jesus to step outside of the Father's will. But Jesus did not succumb. In his experience overcoming temptation Jesus provides the key elements we need for overcoming temptation also. As a Jewish man Jesus was schooled in sacred Scripture to understand both the nature of the Father, and his expectations of us for living a holy life and Jesus was already determined that he would submit to the Father's will, regardless. So when a tempting situation was offered to him, he knew the Father's will as revealed in the Scripture, and willingly surrendered his will to the Father's. Jesus' experience and St. Francis de Sales' advice have one thing in common, the Word of God. Jesus who is the Living Word used the written Word to safely lead him out of temptation's trap. St. Francis de Sales rightly identified the indwelling Word of God as the one who safely turns our dark days of temptation into stepping stones of strength and virtue. As we enter these days of Lent, let's not primarily fasten our eyes on our stained humanity but rather upon him who is the answer to that stain, the Word of God, the indwelling presence of Jesus.

First Sunday of Lent, February 26, 2023
Our Lady of Perpetual Help

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

First Reading —

1. What do you learn about humanity, temptation, and sin from this passage in Genesis?

Second Reading —

2. Compare and contrast the characteristics and effects of the “trespass” with the “free gift?”
3. How would you summarize the Good News in light of this passage?

Gospel Reading —

4. In what ways did Jesus’ response to temptation differ from Adam and Eve’s as seen in the first reading?
5. What can we learn about dealing with temptation from this passage?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another’s openness and sensitivity. Conclude with a final prayer.