

Sunday Homily  
First Sunday of Lent C  
February 21, 2010  
Dt 26:4-10; Rom 10:8-13; Lk 4:1-13

By Deacon Jeff Claar

So how are we doing with our Lenten discipline? Have we been tempted already; and unlike Jesus, given in to that temptation?

*Maybe you heard that a few days ago on Ash Wednesday a priest was walking his dog after dinner. During the walk he notices a young tough coming toward him. As the young man passes, he puts a gun in the back of the priest and says, "give me everything you got!"*

*The priest realizes that he left his wallet at home and has nothing on him to give, except for a Hershey bar. He says to the young man, "I have no money; all I have is a Hershey bar in my coat pocket and you to can have it."*

*The young man is shocked at the priest and as he runs away yells, "Father, you should know I never eat chocolate during Lent!"*

Now our disciplines are good, but like Christ, we must realize they are a means to an end, not the end itself. Jesus was disciplined in avoiding the temptations of the Devil; He also knew that His love for the Father called Him to a much greater sacrifice. His discipline in the desert was only a preparation for his act of love that would reconcile us all back to the Father. We too should use our discipline as a means to an end, and the end should be our own reconciliation and growing love for God.

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I want you to imagine a complete list of those whom you love. And let's say that someone on that list has done something wrong to you.

What does it take to make it right?

If there is true love between the two of you, eventually the one who did wrong knows it and is sorry for what they have done. They are sorry and they want to be forgiven, so they may take it straight to God.

They lie in bed at night and tell God how sorry they are for what they have done. They think they feel forgiven, but this feeling of having done wrong does not go away. They continue to feel the need to tell God how sorry they are for what they have done. How often have you and I done the same thing?

Is the relationship healed by this “taking it straight to God?” No, something is still missing and we know it. True sorrow and reconciliation requires more: it requires a personal encounter. What must really happen?

The one who is wrong must confess what they did directly to the one who was wronged, out loud and face-to-face. When the wrong has been confessed and true sorrow is shown, then and only then can forgiveness happen.

The one who was wronged can then express out loud their forgiveness, and how sweet it is to hear those words, “I forgive you!”

And finally, the one who is forgiven can reaffirm their discipline to not do it again because they know how much they have hurt the one they love. We call this penance.

It is easy to fool ourselves into thinking they we can “take it straight to God.” But that is a temptation put in our hearts by the same one who tempted Jesus. He tells us it is good that if we feel sorry, that is enough, and he is certain that God will forgive us. But we know when we need forgiveness that is not how it works in real life, and we should know that is not how it works with our God whom we love.

Of course, God knows this about us too, and that is why He has given us His special personal encounter known as our Sacrament of Reconciliation. When we do wrong against our God or neighbor we come to realize this as sin. And serious sin harms our relationship with our God whom we love.

We come to feel sorry for this action and we want to say we are sorry face-to-face. God knows this and He places before us His priest to hear our sorrow and offer God’s forgiveness to us. And once we are forgiven, we want to make it right and we are given a penance for that purpose. This is a real and personal encounter of sorrow, forgiveness, and making right; just as it should be between those who love each other.

God was on your list of those whom you love wasn’t He?