

Father Joe did not preach the 4th or 5th Sundays of Ordinary Time

**First Sunday of Lent – C Cycle
February 17, 2013**

INTRODUCTION: (*Deut. 26,4-10; Rom. 10,8-13; Lk.4,1-13*) In our first reading from Deuteronomy, we hear Moses instructing the people in the proper way to worship God. They were to bring to the priest one tenth of the fruits of their land (aka: “tithing”). Along with their offering, they would acknowledge they were once a people without freedom or land. They were now to bring their offering in gratitude for all the ways God has blessed them. The reading prepares us for the gospel where the devil tries to tempt Jesus into worshipping him. The devil promises he in return would give Jesus power over all earthly kingdoms. Jesus quotes another part of Deuteronomy which says, “You shall worship the Lord your God and him alone shall you serve.” (*Deut. 6,13*)

HOMILY: Five weeks ago we celebrated the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist at the Jordan river. Since then we’ve heard about events that happened early on in Jesus’ ministry, such as his first miracle at the wedding feast at Cana. Today we back track a little, to hear what happened right after Jesus’ baptism.

When Jesus was baptized, the Holy Spirit came down upon him and God proclaimed that he was well pleased with Jesus, his Son. Suddenly, as we just heard in the gospel, the scene changed dramatically. The Spirit that came down on Jesus at his baptism led him into the desert. This dramatic shift tells us a lot about the dramatic ups and downs in our own spiritual journey. I trust most of you can remember times when you felt close to God as a loving Father, or you felt some special consolation. Without warning you felt as if you were in a spiritual desert. Suddenly God seemed far away, he seemed to be ignoring you and, as it were, hiding his face from you. Many saints I’ve read about have had experiences like this. In this desert a person often feels they’ve done something wrong, and God is angry. They don’t realize these ups and downs are part of everyone’s spiritual journey, including Jesus himself, and that it’s during those desert periods our faith will be growing deeper and stronger if we don’t give up or get discouraged. Thinking about the experience of Jesus has always been comforting to me when I feel as if I’m in a desert.

Those desert times make us more vulnerable to temptation too. It’s easy to pray and to love God when we feel that he’s close to us and it’s harder when he feels far away. Luke tells us in today’s gospel that it was only after Jesus had fasted those 40 days that the devil showed up. In other words, Jesus was at his most vulnerable point, at least physically. So the devil suggested Jesus turn stones into bread to satisfy his hunger; he offered Jesus power and control over all earthly kingdoms; and, finally, the devil told him that he should come floating down from the peak of the Temple and the Jewish people would instantly recognize him as their messiah.

These temptations, at first, seem so strange. They appear to be quite different from the run of the mill temptations most of us have to deal with: pride, lust, greed, envy, anger,

etc., but in some ways our temptations are similar to those of Jesus. Basically, Jesus' temptations involved the possibility of his using his divine powers for his own benefit. I would suspect temptations like these continued to suggest themselves to Jesus throughout his entire life. For example, we might remember how after he had fed the people miraculously, they wanted to make him their king. He may have found that tempting, but we know he turned away from that possibility. Remember too how when he was arrested in the garden of Gethsemane, he said: "don't you know that I could call on my Father for help and at once he would send me more than twelve armies of angels?" (Mt. 26,53) Yet he would not call on his supernatural powers to save himself. Jesus came to serve and we see him time and time again using his unique powers to serve others, not himself.

In this, the temptations of Jesus are similar to some of our own. Jesus has given us an example that when God has blessed us, we should not be greedy and selfish with what we've been given in terms of time, talent and treasure, but we should be willing to help others.

Now, my last thought, I do not say to those who are already perfect. If you are already perfect you can tune me out, but if there is some room in your spiritual life for improvement, then I have one last word about temptation. During Lent we are encouraged to do something that will bring us closer to Christ or to give up doing something that may keep us from serving Christ more wholeheartedly. Whenever I decide to do something special for Lent, after a couple of weeks I discover that 40 days is a long time, and I begin to let my good intentions slip by the wayside. That's one of my temptations during Lent. I think it's true of others, that many people begin Lent with good intentions, but then get tired of doing what they promised themselves they would try to do better. You will be blessed greatly if you persevere. I say this not just to encourage you, but I say this to myself as well: "don't quit the good work you planned on doing for Lent. Amen.

Fr. Joe did not preach the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Sundays of Lent