

3/10/2019

Creative and loving God, we have come here to celebrate and to journey through these days of Lent. May we grow in faith and courage as we follow the footsteps of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Some of you may have seen a movie called, "The Devil's Advocate. It came out in 1997 and starred Al Pacino and Keanu Reeves. Kevin Lomax, a ruthless young Florida attorney, that never lost a case, is recruited by the most powerful law firm in the country. Despite his mother's disagreement, which compares New York City to Babylon, he accepts the offer and the money that comes along. But soon, his wife starts feeling homesick as she witnesses devilish apparitions. However, Kevin is sinking in his new cases and pays less and less attention to his wife. His boss and mentor, John Milton, seems to always know how to overcome every problem and there is a reason for this, but I do not want to spoil the movie for any of you that might want to watch it.

During the movie John Milton lets us in on his plan to seduce humanity. He says; "You sharpen the human appetite to the point where it can split atoms with its desire; you build egos the size of cathedrals; fiber-optically connect the world to every eager impulse; grease even the dullest dreams with these dollar-green, gold-plated fantasies, until every human becomes an aspiring emperor, becomes his own God... And as we're straddling from one deal to the next, who's got his eye on the planet, as the air thickens, the water sours, and even the bees' honey takes on the metallic taste of radioactivity? And it just keeps coming, faster and faster. There's no chance to think, to prepare; it's buy futures, sell futures, when there is no future!"

It is a great movie to watch during Lent and especially as it relates to today's gospel.

The director of the movie gives a good explanation as to why:

He says; "The people in this story who get into trouble are people who have made certain choices. I don't believe in blaming the Devil for these terrible events; when people have the opportunity to exercise their free will, they choose to damn themselves nine times out of 10. We wanted to show that you make your own choices in life - the Devil is merely the

impulse inside us to choose what we know is ethically wrong. It's not some guy with a forked tail - we ourselves are responsible.

(-Taylor Hackford, director, Devil's Advocate, in Hollywood Online.)

Personally, I don't accept all of what he says. But do I believe that the Devil is real? **Definitely.**

Is temptation real? **You bet.**

The stories of temptation go back to Genesis which we are all very familiar with. As is often the case, that story did not turn out all that well for Adam and Eve. Yet we can all relate to it. According to the definition in Wikipedia; "Temptation is a desire to engage in short-term urges for enjoyment, that threatens long-term goals. [1] In the context of some religions, temptation is the inclination to sin. Temptation also describes the coaxing or inducing a person into committing such an act, by manipulation or otherwise of curiosity, desire or fear of loss. "

None of us are strangers to our gospel reading this morning. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all relate this story, although Mark only mentions it briefly. There are features worth highlighting in Luke's version. For one, Jesus' 40 days in the wilderness corresponds to similar experiences of Moses, Elijah and Ezekiel. Moses "neither ate bread nor drank water" for 40 days and 40 nights when he received the Lord's commandments (Exodus 34:28). After Elijah ate and drank at the angel's command, he journeyed "in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God" (1 Kings 19:4-9). The prophet Ezekiel was instructed to "lie down a second time, but on his right side, and bear the punishment of the house of Judah; forty days I assign you, one day for each year" (Ezekiel 4:6).

Luke wanted to draw out this comparison. The Jews would have also realized the connection. Another thing to note is that after Jesus had been baptized, Luke reports that "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil" (vv. 1-2a; cf. Luke 3:22). Two obvious parallels present themselves. The first is between Jesus and Israel. Just as Israel had wandered in the wilderness for 40 years, Jesus wanders in the wilderness for 40 days,

one day for each year (cf. Numbers 14:33-34; Joshua 5:6). However, the difference is that Jesus, unlike Israel, is led by the Spirit and remains faithful.

A second parallel is that between Jesus and the first couple. Whereas Adam and Eve give in to the serpent's invitation to order the world as they see fit (see Genesis 3:1-7), Jesus does not. We don't know what form the actual temptations took. Pictures show Satan as a snake, as a demon, and even the angelic being that he is. The temptations also could have taken place in the form of visions. Irrespective of that, Jesus' 40-day fast left him exhausted and weak. In short, his flesh and spirit were fully exposed, leaving him completely vulnerable to the devil's assaults. Jesus was tempted with food, with power, and with earthly riches as long as he was willing to worship Satan rather than God. Even so, Jesus withstood the devil's initial attack, which prepared him for his ministry and the final assault when the devil returned at "an opportune time".

We are tempted in many of the same ways. By riches, by fame, by worshipping gods of our own making. Sadly, we know of those who actually worship Satan and deny God. We constantly place ourselves in situations that we know will be more than we can resist. But we do it anyway, because we think we know better or convince ourselves that it is really not that bad. After all, everyone else does it.

We just don't get it. But Jesus did. He knew that temptation is so often connected to impatience. You want something that is quite innocent in itself - a piece of bread, a chance to be a leader, a sign from God - but we get into trouble **because we want it now**. We are unwilling either to wait for it or to work for it, so we take shortcuts - and end up getting into trouble. Society encourages shortcuts and instant gratification. If we win the lottery, all our needs will be met. If we want something, but can't afford it, just charge it. Worry about it later.

Jesus knows human nature. When he gave us the Lord's Prayer, the words, "Lead us not into temptation" were included. Why would we need to ask this of God in the first place? We might illustrate Jesus' words like this: a mother takes her young children grocery shopping with her and comes to the candy aisle. She knows that taking her children down that aisle will only stir up greediness in their hearts and lead to bouts of whining and

pouting. In wisdom, she takes another route—whatever she may have needed down the candy aisle will have to wait for another day. In this way the mother averts unpleasantness and spares her children a trial. Praying, “Lead us not into temptation,” is like praying, “God, don’t take me down the candy aisle today.” It’s recognizing that we naturally grasp for things that will hurt us. There are things that we can do, to help strengthen us against the temptations that we will inevitably face. Prayer and scripture are keys. Adequate rest and healthy eating are also important to maintain our strength. Taking advantage of the Holy Eucharist. Companionship with those who share our beliefs and care about us. Sharing the love of Jesus with others. Yes, we will continue to be tempted, and yes, we will fail God and each other. But we always have a way back when we do. We have Jesus to thank for that.

AMEN