

Homily – Mark 1: 12-15
First Sunday of Lent, Year B
20 / 21 February 2021 - Sooeey

An Arab fable, probably which we have all heard before, tells of a miller who was startled by seeing a camel's nose thrust in at the door of the tent where he was sleeping. "It's very cold outside," said the camel, "I only want to get my nose in." The nose was allowed in, then the neck, finally the whole body. Soon the miller began to be inconvenienced by such an ungainly companion in a room not large enough for both. "If you are inconvenienced," said the camel, "you may leave; as for myself I shall stay where I am." "Give but an inch," says Lancelot Andrews, "and the devil will take an ell; if he can get in an arm, he will makeshift to shove in his whole body."

The Gospel of today warns us against compromising with the devil by allowing him to tempt us. We are told that Jesus faced and defeated the tempter by his forty days of prayer and penance in the desert immediately following His baptism.

Well, during His Baptism, Jesus' awareness about His identity was confirmed; His commitment to His Father's mission was intensified. And here, He was a fully grown up man in the Spirit of God.

It is at this glorious moment, the devil tempted Him to misuse His self awareness; in other words, His own goodness. Satan never tempted Jesus to do anything evil to other people. Instead, he enticed Jesus to use His identity for His self-image and for a happier life with popularity and power. If we look at what happened in the Garden of Eden, we can witness the same trick of the Devil in tempting Eve. She was tempted to misuse her goodness and her individual aim in life: 'to become like God'. Well, there's nothing wrong in aiming to be divine. But the devil wanted her to use it against, the will of God.

Sin is not simply doing anything bad. But it is using our goodness, our God-given power, awareness, our individuality and our greatness for our own selfish purposes, as if God doesn't exist. And Jesus came to confirm that God is still alive; He is still the Supreme Commander. He alone is to be obeyed. Well, He pointed out this truth by the way He handled the temptations of the devil in His life.

One day, Frederick William I visited a prison at Potsdam and listened to a number of pleas for pardon from prisoners who had grievances against the injustice of the laws. All said they had suffered imprisonment on account of prejudiced judges, perjured witnesses, and

unscrupulous lawyers. From cell to cell the tale of wronged innocence continued, until the King stopped at the door of one cell inhabited by a surly inmate who said nothing. Surprised at his silence Frederick said jocularly, “Well I suppose you are innocent too.” “No, your Majesty”, was the startling response; “I am guilty and richly deserve all that I get.” On hearing this, the King shouted at the jail authorities and asked them to set the prisoner free. — The prisoner who admitted his guilt showed certain potential for improvement whereas the others were not likely to change.

Well, the Gospel of today would also tell us how Jesus started preaching His Messianic mission: “The time has come, and the Kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the Good News’. Repentance is a change of mind and heart, a lifelong process of transformation. The Good News Jesus announced is that God is already working here among us, so close to us that we can reach out and touch Him in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Man. But we will be able to experience Jesus as Son of God only if we undergo a complete change in our value system and priorities by means of true repentance.

There is a story of a man who had an apple tree in his garden. He loved apples and believed he could not live without them. However, while the tree never failed to supply him with apples, apples which tasted good, there was something definitely lacking in their quality. One thing was missing – there was no nourishment in them. He consulted a friend who was an expert on apple trees. The expert looked at the tree and pointed out some obvious deficiencies in it. It needed to be sprayed, for its branches were encrusted with moss, the branches needed pruning. It could do with having the earth around it dug up and fertilized. The man listened and acted on the expert's advice. Yet the following autumn the apples, though slightly more plentiful, were no more nourishing. The quality remained unchanged. The man was disappointed and once more consulted the expert. "What more can I do?" he asked. "You are wasting your time." The expert answered. "What do you mean?" "Obviously the only thing to do is to cut the tree down and plant a new one in its place." "But what will I do in the meantime for apples?" "You will have to do without them, won't you?" came the answer. — The question is: was the man ready for a radical decision, in order to have new and wholesome fruit? Well, are we ready for a radical change of heart?

Repentance is the process in which one reorders one's priorities, and changes one's values, ideals, and ambitions, through fasting, prayer and mortification. Lent, then, is a period of self-examination, prompting us to repent of our sins, and so to effect a real conversion: to turn to God and to His teaching, and to do good for others.

Let us then dear brothers and sisters try to conquer our temptations as Jesus did, using the methods Jesus employed. Jesus conquered his tempter, the devil by prayer, penance, and timely use of the word of God. Hence, during this Lent, let us confront our evil tendencies by talking to God, by listening to Him speaking to us through the Holy Bible, and by practicing self-control to subdue our evil tendencies.

Let us also make every effort to convert this Lent into a time for spiritual growth and Christian maturity by: a) participating in the Mass each day online if we can, or at least a few days in the week; b) setting aside some part of our day for personal prayer; c) reading some Scripture, alone or, with the family; d) setting aside some money we might spend on ourselves and giving it and sharing it with those less privileged or less fortunate in our society; e) and by abstaining from those

addictions that we know we need to quit, overcome or come out of.

Well, let us remember that we are never alone on this journey. God is always with us. Let us then allow Him to take our hand. He walks with us all our way. God bless you all, **Amen.**