

Be Gone, Satan! (Mat 4:1-11)

* If we are really committed to Lent, we may wish to follow the objectives of the Lent. These are based on Jesus' teaching of righteousness from Matthew the 5th and 6th chapters. As we've learned the lessons from Matthew during the Epiphany season, we determined the five notable objectives of the Lent; they are as follows: - reconciliation with our brothers and sisters in Christ; - gentle and prayerful behavior toward all people; - humbleness before the Father; - elimination of anger and immoral thoughts from our hearts; - abiding with charity. Reflecting on these goals someone may remark, because we cannot love our enemies and we cannot love the Lord with all our hearts it makes my preparation useless. Friends, God knows that we cannot put *a quart into a pint pot*. I mean, without Jesus none would be qualified for immortality. However, it doesn't mean that we shouldn't exercise the five objectives of the Lent. Now it is time to realize our knowledge from Matthew for all practical purposes.

* Unlike churches that teach mortification as a way by which a Christian can share in Christ's passion, our church doesn't emphasize fasting and abstinence in its teaching. By contrast, in order to meet the Lenten objectives, we centered the teaching and sacramental life on Christ crucified. It is the only way Christians can release the power of their newborn nature from the mortal desires of heart, (1Cor 1:23-31). Following this pattern, we may identify Christ's suffering very personally while hearing the Lenten messages from Matthew and John's gospels assigned for this year. Taking these, along with prayers and practices of Sacraments during Sunday services, we hope to reach the Lenten objectives for Christ's glory.

* If we qualify ourselves as the unworthy servants with hardened hearts, we have a good chance to be changed for better in giving an ear to Christ, our God. At the start, we ask you to join us in prayer beseeching the Lord according to His good will and our needs for change. Here we pray, Dear Father, You are giver of all goodness and are source of holiness. You gave Your only Son to suffer and die for us. You gave us the Holy Spirit and the words of reconciliation that we may believe. You sustain us physically and spiritually as you patiently await the fruits of Your righteousness. Now we implore you, don't turn Your face from us, Your servants, but give us time to hear Your Word of life and allow us to partake worthily in Your pure and life-giving mysteries. Help us in our preparation that on certain day we may appear before Your Son and our Lord as the faithful disciples. Amen.

* The doorway for the Lenten messages each year is always the same, which is about the Lord's temptations in the wilderness. Today it comes from (Mat 4:1-11). Last year, I noted that for Jesus each day in the wilderness was signified with temptations. From the very first day Jesus was tempted by hunger and thirst, by heat and cold, by wild animals, snakes, bugs and so on.

These things might afflict him with pain and suffering each moment during the forty days of trial. Sometime the illusion of a house furnished with a bed and a table served with a meal tempted Jesus to break up the 40 days fasting in advance. A tempter forced him to leave the wilderness. Some like the deceitful voice whispering in his ear behind him, *Take your pleasure ..., it is impossible ... , you need a rest .., it is useless ... , they will not sorrow and repent ...* .

* Now let's see how some people reflected on Jesus' suffering. The history of the church knows the hermits who followed Jesus' in his wilderness experiences, like St. Symeon; he went through the whole forty days without any food. We heard about a person who willingly allowed himself to be nailed on a cross. It might very much impress the spectators. However, such acts of humiliation cannot remove evil from the heart or sinful thoughts from the mind, even if a man would fast without taking any food during the forty days of Lent as Benedictine monk Dom Leante had done over an eleven year period, says the record. On hearing of this, we may be impressed again, but the cause of changing our heart and mind is in God's acts, not in ours, (Rom 9:16). In his baptism Jesus demonstrated the willingness to give us his *righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit*, (Joh 10:10; Rom 14:17) as a gift. The wilderness was a place where Jesus started mastering this gift according to his Father's will.

* The 40 days fasting in the desert was almost over when satan moved forward to Jesus. You know, the last hour of a battle is extremely dangerous for a soldier who has fought throughout the day. Being wounded and exhausted, such a warrior can be seen as a sitting duck for the strong and fresh troops coming upon him again. That was with Jesus, when satan appeared before him; he was extremely weakened physically, meanwhile the oppressor was strong. At that time the most skilful demon launched his dreadful weapons against Jesus. *And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry, says the Scripture. At that moment the tempter came* , (Mat 4:2,3a).

* The commentators approach Jesus' temptation differently, some of them take the event literally. On the other hand, some of them offer the symbolic description of a purely inward struggle. However, we don't think that there was a problem for the devil to show himself bodily as some other angels have shown. Friends, the devil really exists, we have known this not only from the Book but also from our life-experiences, likewise this one. When I served as a chaplain in the nursing home, I had a list of people whom I ought to visit regularly. Among the people on my list, there was the 65 year old man who probably liked traveling. Often he was seen in his wheelchair moving from one place to another. He was never silent and never looked at my eyes. Anyone passing him could hear the low guttural sound produced by his lungs. A nurse said that after a stroke he couldn't speak. Once I followed after him into his room. I wanted to read him a Psalm and pray.

For some reason I started with the Lord's prayer in Hebrew. While I was praying, the man scared me with an angry growling as he if he was changed into a leopard prepared for a leap. I felt like my skin turned into that of a goose. After saying, *Amen*, I asked him, *What is your name?* He answered, *"Red Rest."* These were only words I had ever heard from him. Being perplexed with its meaning, I looked for a definition and I found it. It turned out that the word "Rest" is a slang word for "Death." After that I didn't doubt anymore, the man was possessed by a demon, "Red Death." Several times I saw people in convulsions with foaming on their lips, a very similar picture to what we read in the Gospels. The Satan is real and he is in a war with Christians who follow Jesus' teaching of righteousness! (Rev 12:17).

* Now, going back to Jesus in the desert, it says that the devil couldn't scare or deceive him (Mat 4:4,7,10) as he deceived the woman (Gen 3:1-6) because in this case the devil had to deal with the Son who obeyed his Father even to death. Everything that the Father willed by sending the Son in the wilderness he had done. Jesus deprived himself of his divine power in order that the Father's will and his Word would be fulfilled. *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."* Jesus denied to make people believe in him by demonstrating his exclusiveness because it would be against the teaching of God's Word, as he said, *'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test,'* And in the end, according to his human nature, Jesus demonstrated his absolute subjectiveness to the Father, *"You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve."* That is also the memory verse for our practical purposes. At that moment the great battle of our Lord against the powers of sin and the devil was won for us. But the final battle was still ahead.

* Now trying to find any analogies between our 40 days season of Lent and Jesus' 40 days in the wilderness we found nothing in common except temptations. Even though they are not so excessive if we compare them with Jesus' temptations, any way they are a reality of our days. The devil wants to pull us astray from Jesus' grace by our disobedience. He tries to substitute the means of grace by keeping the human traditions. Finally, he wants to make Christ's saving work in us useless by love of money and pleasures of this world. As much as the devil's weapons have been exposed and Jesus' victory resounded for the benefit of the listeners, we have leaned closely to our Savior and Satan be gone.

Glory to our Father for his Son who defeated Satan under our feet again.

AMEN