Readings for March 1, 2020 – First Sunday of Lent

**Facing Our Demons**

The desert, biblically and mystically, is not so much a physical place, a geography, as a place in the heart. The desert is where we go to face our demons, feel our smallness, be in a special intimacy with God, and prepare ourselves for the promised land ... Jesus shows us that in order to be filled by God, one must first be emptied. (From Fr. Ron Rolheiser)

Opening Prayer – Choose one from the back pages

**Reading 1**  
**GN 2:7-9; 3:1-7**

The LORD God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being. Then the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and placed there the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground the LORD God made various trees grow that were delightful to look at and good for food, with the tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Now the serpent was the most cunning of all the animals that the LORD God had made. The serpent asked the woman, “Did God really tell you not to eat from any of the trees in the garden?” The woman answered the serpent: “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; it is only about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God said, ‘You shall not eat it or even touch it, lest you die.’” But the serpent said to the woman: “You certainly will not die! No, God knows well that the moment you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods who know what is good and what is evil.” The woman saw that the tree was good for food, pleasing to the eyes, and desirable for gaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate it; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

**Responsorial Psalm**  
**PS 51:3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 17.**

R. (cf. 3a) **Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.**
Have mercy on me, O God, in your goodness; in the greatness of your compassion wipe out my offense. Thoroughly wash me from my guilt and of my sin cleanse me.

R. **Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.**
For I acknowledge my offense, and my sin is before me always: “Against you only have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight.”

R. **Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.**
A clean heart create for me, O God, and a steadfast spirit renew within me. Cast me not out from your presence, and your Holy Spirit take not from me.
R. Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.
Give me back the joy of your salvation, and a willing spirit sustain in me.
O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall proclaim your praise.
R. Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.

Reading 2  ROM  5:12-19 OR  5:12,  17-19

Brothers and sisters: Through one man sin entered the world, and through sin, death, and thus death came to all men, inasmuch as all sinned— for up to the time of the law, sin was in the world, though sin is not accounted when there is no law. But death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who did not sin after the pattern of the trespass of Adam, who is the type of the one who was to come. But the gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one, the many died, how much more did the grace of God and the gracious gift of the one man Jesus Christ overflow for the many. And the gift is not like the result of the one who sinned. For after one sin there was the judgment that brought condemnation; but the gift, after many transgressions, brought acquittal. For if, by the transgression of the one, death came to reign through that one, how much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of justification come to reign in life through the one Jesus Christ. In conclusion, just as through one transgression condemnation came upon all, so, through one righteous act, acquittal and life came to all. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so, through the obedience of the one, the many will be made righteous.

Gospel  MT  4:1-11

At that time Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was hungry. The tempter approached and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become loaves of bread.” He said in reply, “It is written: One does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.” Then the devil took him to the holy city, and made him stand on the parapet of the temple, and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written: He will command his angels concerning you and with their hands they will support you, lest you dash your foot against a stone.” Jesus answered him, “Again it is written, You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.” Then the devil took him up to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in their magnificence, and he said to him, “All these I shall give to you, if you will prostrate yourself and worship me.” At this, Jesus said to him, “Get away, Satan! It is written: The Lord, your God, shall you worship and him alone shall you serve.” Then the devil left him and, behold, angels came and ministered to him.
Related Reflections

Don’t forget that we have a great resource for resisting temptation. It is Jesus himself. Because he was tempted like us, says the Bible, he understands and sympathizes with us, and stands ready to help us in our time of need and weakness. You only have to ask him.    Rev. David Bast – Words of Hope    woh.org

We live lives of tortured complexity. Inside each of us there is both a saint and a sinner. Our hearts are a murky caldron of grace and sin, angels and demons. Always, it seems, we are torn in a way that leaves us feeling unsure, guilty, and tense. It is no simple task being a human being.

Henri Nouwen, in commenting on this, once described himself this way: “My fears and resulting fatigue over the last three years might well be diagnosed as a lack of single-mindedness, as a lack of simplicity. Indeed, how divided my heart has been and still is! I want to love God, but also to make a career. I want to be a good Christian, but also have my successes as a teacher, preacher, or speaker. I want to be a saint, but also enjoy the sensations of the sinner. I want to be close to Christ but also popular and liked by people. No wonder that living becomes a tiring enterprise.” (The Genesee Diary). This could be a description of any soul, yours, mine. Jung was right, energy is not always friendly. It brings with it a host of demons.

Demons, Jesus tells us, are to be confronted in the desert. The desert is that place where one does battle with satan. What exactly does that mean? Is satan, the devil, to be conceived of as a personified force, a fallen archangel, Lucifer? Or is satan a code name for that vast range of inner disturbances (addictions, scars, paranoia, fear, bitterness, and sexual wounds) that habitually torment us? What exactly are the principalities and powers that are beyond us? That question is not so important here. Whether the devil is a person, an addiction, or a paranoia, in the end we still need to do battle at exactly the same place. Most of us are not called upon to confront the satan of classical exorcisms. Rather we meet satan in the same way that the prodigal son and his older brother met him, in weakness and bitterness. Ultimately these are the demons that must be met. The venue for that meeting, scripture tells us, is the desert.

To go into the desert means to stare our inner chaos in the face. What demons live inside this chaos? The demons of the prodigal son and his older brother – the demons of grandiosity, loneliness, and unbridled sexuality and the demons of paranoia, woundedness, and joylessness. What faces do these take?

Grandiosity is the demon that tells us that we are the center of the universe, that our lives are more important than those of others. This is a demon manifest in our daydreams, where we are always the special one, the superstar, the one singled out for greatness. This is the demon of self-preoccupation and self-centeredness, forever urging us to stand out, to be special. Loneliness is the demon of unhealthy restlessness. This is a demon of fear which torments us by telling us constantly that, at the end of the day, we will be alone, unloved, excluded, outside the circle. It makes us pathologically restless and desperate, looking always for someone or something that can take our loneliness away. Unbridled sexuality is the demon of obsession, addiction, lust. It makes us believe that sex (or some such pleasure) is a panacea, the final salvation, or, if not that, at least the best this world can offer. Its urges is to bracket everything else – sacred commitment, moral ideal, and consequences for ourselves and others – for a single, furtive pleasure. It is a demon with ten thousand faces obsessing us all, whether we admit it or not.

Paranoia is the demon of bitterness, anger, and jealousy. It makes us believe that life has cheated us, that we have not been given our just place, or that the celebration is always about others and never about us. This demon fills us with the urge to be cynical, cold, distrustful, and cursing. Woundedness is the demon that tells us that our innocence and wholeness is irretrievably broken and that, for us, it is too late. The best we can do now is to take consolation in comfort, food, drink, pornography, drugs, or some such thing. Finally, the last
demon in this family is that of joylessness, the demon of self-pity which tells us that joylessness is maturity, that cynicism is wisdom, and that bitterness is justice. This is the demon that keeps us from entering the room of celebration and joining the dance.

All of these demons are inside every one of us. To stare them in the face is to enter the desert. A scary thing? Yes, but the scriptures assure us that, if we do muster the courage to face them, God sends angels to minister to us and these angels bring along calm, restfulness, patience, empathy, humility, solicitude, joy, playfulness, and humor.

Fr. Ron Rolheiser (ronrolheiser.com)

You Are My Beloved

Jesus sweeps into the desert, filled with the Holy Spirit, led by a voice that had proclaimed, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased” (Luke 3:21-22). These are the words of God the Father. Notice, they were nearly the same as God’s utterance eight hundred years before: Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen in whom my soul delights, upon whom I have put my spirit; he shall bring forth justice to the nations (Isaiah 42:1-4).

Was Jesus surprised to hear this? In the most profound sense, no. After all he already knew in his deepest soul that he was divine. But he was also human, and completely so. Therefore, in his explicit, daily, human mind, he was surprised. Though he had read and re-read the Isaiah passage since he was at his mother’s knee, only now did it all click into place.

His vocation was to be the chosen one. So, he was led by the Holy Spirit into the desert in order to recall the Father’s words again and again, over and over, in silence and with an openness so holy that it would seem almost like emptiness.

But someone else was aware of these events. The devil, with a dumb and greedy knowledge, knew that this great servant of God could be used for ugly motives. Jesus’ strength, his God-like holiness, the fame that he would acquire, all these could become a tool for subjecting the world to evil. So he slid over to Jesus.

“No point in being empty,” he said. “Just give a Godly command and this stone will turn into bread and get rid of that hunger.” In other words, You know you are God, don’t you? Take whatever you want. Have a great life!

Jesus answered from the scriptures. “No one lives by bread alone.” These words paraphrase Moses’ great second speech to the people of Israel: Not by bread alone does man live, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of the Lord (Deuteronomy 8:3).

(Note to reader: how do you and I assuage our hungers?)

The devil hurried on to a second temptation. “Join me, worship me. All the kingdoms in the world will be yours, as they are mine already.” (Translation: you can be bigger than this heavenly king of yours.) Jesus replied, “You shall worship the Lord your God, and him alone shall you serve” (see Dt 6:13).

(Note to the reader: whom do you and I worship and serve?)

Two temptations have failed. Yet, “even the devil can quote scripture.” So it uses Psalm 91—the part about God commanding angels to guard his beloved one (Ps 91:11-12). “Just throw yourself off these
heights,” he proposes smoothly. “God’s angels will have no choice, they will have to come save you. Take advantage of who you are.”

(Note to the reader: Don’t you sometimes want to show off your power?)

Jesus again answered from the same book of scripture (Dt 6:16). “You shall not tempt the Lord your God,” he says. His meaning: God the Father is first and above all. If you can bribe him to do tricks for you, then you will seem equal to him! But you aren’t.*

(Note to the reader: don’t we sometimes act like we think we are God?)

Welcome to Lent!

John Foley, SJ https://liturgy.slu.edu/1LentC031019/reflections_foley.html

Suggested Meditation:

Take 5-10 min. to reflect, then share if you are willing (this reflection is a bit personal).

Fr. Rolheiser talks about the importance of naming and understanding our demons. These are the persons, situations (or maybe temptations) you are the most uncomfortable with. Think for a few minutes and write down a few of the things that could be viewed as demons in your life, or in general. You may also want to read the prayer below by Becky Eldredge and ponder the questions.

How can owning them, or naming them help you to overcome them? What if you’re not ready to get rid of them? Sometimes it requires changing your way of life, or habits of thinking.

O, God of second chances, thankfully you give us this time during Lent to be filled, directed and empowered by your Spirit. As we enter fully into Lent, show us what we need to see to more fully follow your Gospel. What in our lives needs the anointing of your Spirit? What in our lives needs clarity on the direction we are being invited to? What in our lives do we need strength to feel empowered to go out and do in your name?

We seek to be filled, directed and empowered by your Spirit, O God of second chances, to overcome the temptations in our own lives as your son overcame the temptations in the desert. We seek to be filled and directed by your Spirit as we go out into our public ministries, as Jesus was directed to do after his time alone with you.

Becky Eldredge – Loyolapress.com -Lent
Questions for Discussion

What do you think was happening in the first reading when their eyes were opened and suddenly they realized they were naked? Can you relate this to something that you may have gone through in your life (hopefully not literally)?

If you want to read more about this Genesis account, see the following article:
https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2014/10/24/learning-our-first-parents-can-we-see-adam-and-eve-ane

Look over the questions asked in our reflection from Fr. John Foley. Talk a little bit about these ideas:

How do you and I assuage our hungers?

Whom do you and I worship and serve? (Or what?)

Don’t we sometimes act like we think we are God?

Don’t you sometimes want to show off your power?

If we look at our theme for this Lenten season, “Into your hands,” how does that fit with our readings today? Does this attitude help us to avoid temptation and to live more in harmony with God (as was intended in our Old Testament reading)? In what ways? Can we avoid temptation by ourselves?

Thought for reflection at home this week:

Lent is a time of paring down — a time spent in the desert, if you will — as exemplified by Jesus' 40 days of fasting in these arid, barren lands. He was tempted three times by Satan, and rejected each attempt, giving glory to God at every turn. This is the lesson for us, that we make God the center of our lives and not test him. We are here to do his will, which is clarified through our own Lenten sacrifices.

What can I do this week to pare down my life? What can I let go of, so that I might have more freedom to be the person God created me to be? What can I put into God’s hands?
Closing Prayer Option: Intercessions for Lent

Group leader: “As we gather again as people called and inspired by Jesus, let us pray together:”

For the grace to be aware: that we may slow down, detach ourselves from the busyness of daily life and find a quiet place to listen to God. We pray to the Lord...

For the gift of listening: that we may be open to the Word of God, allow our hearts to be stretched and transformed, and be enlightened by its wisdom. We pray to the Lord...

For wisdom: that God will lead us to freedom of spirit and inspire our choices as we face trials and temptations in life. We pray to the Lord...

For a spirit of gratitude: that we may recognize and give thanks for all of God’s gifts to us and place them in the service of the Gospel. We pray to the Lord...

For the courage to let go: that we may be able to put things into God’s hands, and to have open hands to receive what God wants to give us. We pray to the Lord...

For Pope Francis: that God will guide him in leading the church, and help him be an instrument of healing and hope for all Catholics, and for the world. We pray to the Lord...

For all who hunger each day, particularly children: that our hearts may be open to sharing our bounty with all who are in need during this Lenten season. We pray to the Lord...

For all who fast during this season: that they may grow in their awareness that God is the source and strength of their life. We pray to the Lord...

For all who exercise power: that they may be good stewards of the authority entrusted to them and use their power for the common good. We pray to the Lord...

For all who are struggling with life: for those who are addicted, for those who have lost meaning, and for those who have considered suicide: that God will send angels to assist and support them through their challenges. We pray to the Lord...

For this community of faith: that through our Lenten journey we may prepare to renew our profession of faith and become more faithful to the Gospel in word and deed. We pray to the Lord...

Leader: “Hear our prayers Lord and grant that we may continue to empty ourselves this Lent, as Jesus showed us during his time in the desert. May it lead to greater fullness in you. We ask this through Christ our Lord, Amen.