

February 17 & 18, 2018
First Sunday of Lent (B)

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1st Sunday of Lent

Well, here we are with another season of Lent...another season where the Church's "holy spring" or better known as spring cleaning of the soul is upon us! Yes, it's a time of self-denial but also a time of JOY because we are preparing for Easter and in doing so, we're clothing ourselves in newness of life and isn't that what spring is all about?!?

Patricia Livingston, a Speaker and Retreat Director, tells how she made a Holy Week Retreat reflecting on the Gospel of Mark and the retreat director pointed out that it was right after Jesus' baptism in the Jordan that he was driven into the desert to be tested for 40 days. Jesus had just heard the voice of His Father saying, "You are my beloved Son, with You I am well pleased."...and the very next words in Mark are "At once the Spirit drove him out into the desert where he was tempted by Satan." Then the priest connected the retreatants lives with the life of Jesus when he said that we, too, are **beloved and bewildered, driven into the desert, so to speak**, and this was a moment of great grace for her...and isn't God saying to us as God said to Jesus, "You are my beloved one!"

So the Spirit who came upon Jesus at his baptism now sends him out to be tested. We certainly know that temptations abound in our lives and they are not sent to make us fall – they are sent to strengthen our minds, hearts, and souls...meant for our good not for our ruin. We heard in our gospel reading how Jesus was among the wild beasts and the angels ministered to him. Beasts may have been friendly beasts and Mark by telling us that angels ministered to him.

Jesus wasn't left alone to fight his temptations and neither are we.

The last sentence in our gospel covers a multitude. **Repent and believe in the Gospel.** The Greek word for repent is “metanoia” literally meaning a change of heart...I'm really sorry and want to change. To believe in the Good News simply means to take Jesus at his word, to believe that God is the kind of God that Jesus has told us about, to believe that God so loves the world that God will make any sacrifice to bring us back to Godself...it's to believe that what sounds too good to be true is REALLY true. So let's break open what that means. Let's think about when we were baptised. We received the gift of the consciousness of God...the God who loves us so much that he took on the whole human experience so that we would never be alone.

We, as a parish during these Lenten days, will be prayerfully looking at racism hopefully in a new way as we reflect on Jim Wallace's book and as we journey these days with our immigrant sisters and brothers living under the constant fear of ICE taking them away from their loved ones. And what about gun control in our country? These are the continuing tragedies that keep defeating humanity. These are the tragedies that we need to take courage and stand up against with more than lip service. But first, we need to face the demons in ourselves. Think about it...temptations are always about good things or we would not be tempted. It's always harder to be tempted by pure evil which is easier to spot and reject. The true temptation is the good one.

The more we understand or are **aware** of what's going on inside of us and outside of us, the more we can choose as Jesus did and become the good news for others to see. I think sometimes we are tempted to get bogged down

on ourselves that we don't seem to be doing better than we think we should be doing.

The Jesuit, James Martin, a great spiritual writer, tells of how his spiritual director would sometimes call his thinking the HINDERER. By that he meant we tend to turn more toward our inner demons who tell false stories about us to subvert our identities, rather than turning toward God, who knows our true story, our real identity.

Again, at Jesus' baptism he heard he was called the Father's beloved Son. He could have

enjoyed headiness power but he chose to bend his will to God's. Like Jesus, we can be tempted through our gifts. Maybe I've been given the gift of charm and I could use that gift to get away with almost anything or maybe I've been gifted with the power to use words well and use that power to advance my own agenda or maybe confuse and manipulate the truth.

Here at All Saints, whenever we celebrate a baptism, and renew our baptismal promises, Fr. Fred's questions to us really make us stop and think.

Here are some similar questions for baptismal promises that I'd like to share with you:

Do we renounce the lies of the world that measures our worth by success, prestige, status, and money?

Do we renounce the false idea we must be perfect and never fail or make mistakes?

Do we renounce the concept of God that was based on fear and judgment?

Do we believe in the unconditional ever present love of God for us both in our virtue and vice, in our achievements and failures, in our successes and defeats?

Do we believe that God's love will never cease even in death and therefore overcome death itself?

Do we believe that with such a loving God we need not fear anything or anyone, for we are chosen and beloved? Do we really believe that?

So as we begin our parish journey together these Lenten days and prayerfully reflect on how alive and well racism is in our country, I'd like to recall our memory re: Martin Luther King Jr, how in April of 1963 he traveled from Atlanta to Birmingham to preach nonviolent resistance against segregation, but the local religious leaders viewed him an outside agitator. But he left Atlanta and went to Birmingham because “injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

I'd like to end with a quote from Joan Chittister who describes this age as an “in-between

time when one age is passing away and a new age is emerging. “No seed ever sees a flower” and she continues on how we are in this in-between generation...the seeds that will not see the flower. The only question is whether or not we will see the seeds we, too, are planting as simply the beginnings of a new future, planted in hard ground, yes, and slow growing, yes, but to be tended and believed in so that their harvest time can surely come.

MAY WE NEVER SUBMIT TO THE TEMPTATION OF LOSING HOPE!

Amen!