

**Homily for February 17, 2002
1st Sunday of Lent Cycle A**

By Father Charles Bowes

**Genesis 12:1-4a
2 Timothy 1:8-b-10
Matthew 17:1-9**

It's safe to face everything evil or good, struggling or stable in us.

It's important not to get sidetracked in the story of the temptations of Jesus into focusing on what happened to Jesus, and missing the glorious opportunity for connecting our struggles through this gateway to the Father in Jesus Christ.

Power, fame, fortune, sensuality – the temptations of Jesus run the gamut of all that is human. There is nothing of the human that is a stranger to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ – nothing of the human that has not been touched by his saving grace. And because Jesus has been revealed as God's Savior for us, we can connect our struggles and our triumphs and our evils with the Lord Jesus and thereby invite God's invasion and triumph in us precisely where we live and breathe.

Notice how Jesus is portrayed as dealing with the temptations presented to him – he does not confront them directly. Rather, he is shown as using a verse of scripture – the words of another – the words of God's Good Book. Jesus focuses his need, his temptation upon the strength of the Father. We, for our part, need merely turn to Jesus in the midst of whatever temptation to power, fame and fortune we find ourselves. For example, I enjoy using and even owning

fine tools – as a mechanic working on cars. And even now, though I don't do much of it, I enjoy looking at instruments to be used in clock making and clock repair. I remember, as a child, how eagerly the mechanics at our shop used to await the arrival of the representative from the Diamond Tool Company – not only to see the latest but also to replace whatever was needed. For one who has a penchant for possessing such fine instruments, rather than confront my temptation to possession directly, the way of the Christian would be to unite with, to question the Lord about His involvement with things as a craftsman and ask such questions as: "Lord, did you have a favorite hammer as a carpenter? Was there a neighbor's tool you highly prized? Was there a wood chisel belonging to Joseph you hoped one day to call your own?" Usually, whatever our particular temptation or struggle or strength is, we ask questions of the Lord and then – then, we listen for an answer – listen for an image, perhaps the melody of a song – whatever – which opens us to simplicity and clarity – shifting our focus ever so briefly to the power that lies ready to flood us with insight and strength. We shift our focus through a question ever so briefly in the effort to listen so that the strength to live more simply flows from God and not from us. In this way, Jesus becomes the gateway,

allowing us access to God's strength, God's life. And the point of departure is precisely whatever struggle or strength in which we are engaged.

Certainly for Lent we can choose a penance – not to earn anything from God – but rather to be the occasion for us to invite God to draw near in Jesus. For me, I like to listen to public radio – the news every evening. For my Lenten penance I'm going to forego that – but in that hour I'll certainly be tempted and in those moments I'll simply ask the Lord, "What are things you especially enjoyed listening to, Lord? Was it music, dancing?" Notice there's nothing wrong in listening to good information on the radio – but by making it into a penance it becomes the occasion for inviting God to draw near – even my failure, my occasional lapse in the penance becomes the occasion for the questioning prayer and the listening.

Jesus does not stop being human by the fact that he is now glorified. Rather everything, good or bad, is a fair platform from which to question Jesus about his handling of similar issues.

This weekend in Catholic churches throughout the world, Catechumens sign their names in a book – put ink on a page – and by their so doing we find ourselves likewise located so very near to God and God so very close to us. Each of us, without exception, has our name written in God's heart – awaiting our simple question and then listening for God to come near and set us free from where we are confined and to strengthen where we are strong.

Let us pray: Good and gracious God, we do not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from you. Open our hearts to receive; our ears to hear the power of your presence through Jesus Christ our Lord.

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