

**Homily for February 13, 2005
First Sunday of Lent (A)**

By Father Charles Bowes

**Genesis 2:7-9; 3:1-7
Psalm 51:3-6, 12-13, 17
Romans 5:12-19
Matthew 4:1-11**

The challenge of the future and the challenge of Lent are real and abiding.

And so here is Lent...none too soon, I feel. As I mentioned on Ash Wednesday, the state of the world in which we live may be calling us to prayer, fasting and works of kindness, not for the sake of Lenten piety, but because they may be our only way to peace - peace in our hearts and in our world.

Two challenges I share with you today, one about our future collaboration with neighboring parishes and the second, the challenge of Lent itself. Our parish is now in a cluster of parishes along with Saint Matthias, Saint Bartholomew, Saint James of the Valley and Saint Vivian. This may not be the final arrangement, but for now this is our "pastoral region." The whole Archdiocese is being divided up into regions, anticipating a day when one or two priests will serve the parishes of that region. So for us, two priests are forecast to serve our five parishes at some point in the years ahead.

To help us begin to think and move in that direction of sharing priests, our five parishes are collaborating to provide two communal services of reconciliation, for Lent and later for Advent. The priests of our five regional parishes will serve as confessors.

Different parishes will host such services each season. Saint James of the Valley and Saint Bartholomew will host this Lent, both services to be at 7:30 p.m. The first, a week from this Monday evening, February 21; the second on a Tuesday evening, March 1 (these dates and times are and will be in the bulletin along with scheduled Reconciliation services for other clusters of parishes). Of course, each parish has its regular weekly times for the sacrament of reconciliation of individual penitents. Ours is every Saturday from 3:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Our future collaboration is a challenge, but with God's help, we'll be a Church made new in the Spirit of the Risen Lord. And this challenge to collaborate on services of reconciliation leads us to embrace and be embraced by the challenge of Lent. Lent is a time to acknowledge our sinfulness, but not to dwell on it. It is good to note that temptation is not the same as sin. And in our Gospel, Matthew chapter four, we see Jesus challenged by temptation.

Tradition says that Jesus was tempted with every temptation known to humankind. This was to assert his total humanness. Otherwise, he could not have been so totally identified with our human lot. But temptations are not sins. No matter how fiery the passion gets, they are not sin. Temptation has a consistently bad meaning

in the English language. The Greek word for temptation, *peirazein*, has a different meaning. It is to test. What we call "temptation" is not meant to make us sin; it is meant to enable us to conquer sin. It is not meant to make us bad; it is meant to make us good. It is not meant to weaken us; it is meant to make us stronger through the ordeal. As William Barclay so beautifully states: "Temptation is not the penalty for being a man; temptation is the glory of being a man."

What this illustrates is that we are tempted, not so much through our weaknesses, but through our strengths. We are tempted according to our personalities, our passions, our likes and dislikes, our abilities, our money, our power, our beauty, our handsomeness. If we are enterprising, we might be tempted toward amassing money. If skilled in organization, our temptations lean toward power. If passionate and spirited in personality, we tip toward sensual gratification. If intelligent and bright, the lure is toward arrogance.

God allows temptation to help us to know the boundaries of our strengths and to clarify our goals. God helps us to go into our own deserts, and, here and there, we fail the test. That's the reason Jesus had to win his challenge - so he could be our victory and salvation as we meet, head on, the Satans of whatever sort that tempt us to choose the lesser good. And Jesus had to win the challenge of being tempted away from the cross, because he knew that we could not save ourselves. The Lenten journey begins in the desert and ends in an empty tomb.

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