This week, we’ve entered a new season on our liturgical calendar - Lent. Although Lent may not be a season of festive celebration, it is nevertheless the most meaningful, meditative and holiest season leading up to the Holy Week. Over these 40 days, not including Sundays, we are called to hit the “Pause” button and to slow things down in the midst of our busy and hectic lives. It is an opportunity for us to purge and renew our minds both mentally and spiritually.

Some people may “give up” certain things or “privileges” over Lent as a disciplinary practice of prioritizing our lives…of what are essential and what are dispensable in our lives. Some people intentionally take on new spiritual practices such as personal devotionals, fasting, meditation and prayer, or volunteer services...etc. in order help them rekindle and reconnect their relationships with God.

On Ash Wednesday we were reminded that ***“from dust we came, and to dust we shall return.”*** Many Christians, Catholics as well as Protestants, received the ***visible sign of ashes through God’s invisible grace.* These ashes signify our human depravity and our brokenness in light of God’s perfect plan for humanity.** These 40 days of Lent also remind us of the wilderness journey that Jesus traveled, the moment after He was being baptized as he was about to begin his public ministry.

In the passage that we read earlier, Satan wasted no time in putting Jesus to the test. Satan came to visit when Jesus was the most vulnerable, when he was all by himself in the wilderness. However, he wasn’t all alone. God sent angels to attend or to accompany Jesus and to look out after Him. In some translations, this same word “to attend” was translated to as **to serve,** **to take care of, or even to minister to**.[[1]](#footnote-1)

When Satan came upon Jesus to be tested out in the wilderness, God allowed that to take place…very much like Job as some of us are currently studying in our afternoon Bible Study. Satan sought permission from God in order to test Job’s faithfulness and allegiance. Verse 1 tells us that the Holy Spirit **“led”** Jesus into the wilderness. This suggests that the **Holy Spirit was accompanying him throughout this whole ordeal, while the Father kept watch having full confidence in his son that he would not turn against Him or betray Him.**

Being tempted is natural and human. Although Jesus was fully God, he was also fully human, with flesh and bone, just like us. Jesus had his human physical needs and desires as well. When he didn’t eat for 40 days and 40 nights, he was completely famished and needed food just like we all do. Jesus had his dreams, hopes, and passions in achieving his goals, just like we do also. But what differentiates Jesus from us was that he remained anchored and grounded in his faith, whereas we often fail the tests miserably that are put before us. Jesus went into the wilderness fully equipped and was ready to defend himself from the forces of evil and temptations of this world.

Come to think of it, we all have our shares of tests and temptations that we face each day. From the moment we wake up until we lay our heads at night, we are subjected to all forms of testing or “temptations” through our actions and our thoughts. Sometimes we don’t even know it. Some temptations bear greater consequences than the others.

The Holy Spirit grants us the **freedom of conscience** to discern what is right, acceptable and honorable in God’s sight, while we maintain our spiritual discipline of self-control and obedience to God. But what Jesus had to put up with was more than any of the earthly temptations that we face. His wilderness experience served as a benchmark for our inner strength and spiritual endeavor to withstand the presence of evil in this world.

**When it comes to evil, we acknowledge that evil is real. It is unavoidable, but it is not unmanageable.**  It takes a great stamina to resist the evil’s temptations in our lives. **When we fail to resist evils, we risk falling into sin…sins against God and sins against humanity.** Ever since the days of Adam and Eve, Satan was lurking and always waiting for the next “opportune” time to strike. As we read earlier, after Satan’s failed attempts on Jesus, he declared that he would return “*until an opportune time*”. “*Until an opportune time!*” If today he did not succeed, he will surely come again maybe tomorrow, or the next day. He’ll keep on trying again and again. So what does that mean for us? It means that we need to be in a constant lookout for ourselves, as well as for one another.

All in all, **we must remain vigilant not only when we are in the times of crises and challenges but also in the times of prosperity and blessings. When things are going well, when we are prosperous and well fed, just like Job, we need to be prepared to defend and resist for Satan’s next opportune visit!**

Like the Israelites who were journeying through the wilderness for 40 years and arrived to the promised land, God did not just hand it to them and let them march right in and settle. The people had to work hard for it. They must demonstrate faith and obedience before God granting them victory over their enemies. There was no instant reward without making any personal commitment and sacrifice.

God reminded the Israelites to never forget what God has done for them, who had led them out of Egypt, across the Red Sea and through the wilderness. God had heard their constant re-LENTless cries and complaints for their lacking in food, water, and shelter, and safety from their enemies. Yet time after time the people failed their challenges and fell into the temptations of idolatry of replacing their trust and obedience in God with the worldly desires and gratifications.

**What about us? How might Satan be testing us today that would draw us away from God?** The season of Lent invites us to do just that…to see things from a fresh new perspective, with a different lens, and to dream about the possibility of what might seem impossible by our own standards and human effort. But with God, all things are possible.[[2]](#footnote-2)  **Lent invites us to reflect, contemplate and get back on the right track, through our journey to the cross on these 40 days.**

At times we may find ourselves being caught in a spiritual tug-of-war between evil and good, between Satan and God. The ultimate plot for Satan is to pull us over and away from God.

**Temptations make us more vulnerable of our own human weaknesses and shortcomings but they can also strengthen our endurance and perseverance**. When we are faced with various trials and challenges, Jesus reassured us, ***“Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."[[3]](#footnote-3)***

Through these series of temptations as we read today, God sent Jesus on this earthly mission so that He may experience what WE experience on a daily basis. When Jesus experienced hunger, after not having eaten for 40 days, Satan tempted Him to turn the stones into bread. All you have to do is just say the word and command those stones and turn them into bread. But Jesus had the conscience of mind that that would be an abusive use of his power. Through each of the temptations, Jesus responded to Satan with the word of God by saying, “***Man does not live by bread alone.”[[4]](#footnote-4)*** **Strike One!**

Then Satan tried once again. This time he went after our human craving for success, power and security. Satan showed Jesus all the splendors of which this world has to offer. All he had to do was to simply bow down and worship Him. Again, Jesus knew what was at stake if he had yielded to Satan’s request. He once again defended himself using scriptures saying, “***Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.”[[5]](#footnote-5)* That would be Strike Two!**
 Finally Satan tested Jesus’ ultimate allegiance and fidelity to the Father by asking him to jump off the temple’s steeple and allow God’s angels to rescue him and save him from danger. Once again, Jesus responded with scriptures saying, “***Do not put the Lord you God to the test.”[[6]](#footnote-6)*That’s Strike Three! Satan, you’re OUT!**

In each of these temptations, Satan knew our very human weaknesses and desires, craftily used words of scripture to support his claims. Jesus was ready for this spiritual confrontation. This is why it is vital that we need to be familiar with God’s voice and be equipped with God’s words so that we may remain grounded in our faith, and practice them in our lives.

During this season of Lent, God is inviting us to examine our own spiritual journey. ***Where is God in your lives right now? Is God just some imaginary “higher power” who set things in motion and let us deal with them on our own?*** Of course not! As we read today, the Holy Spirit is journeying with us and is leading us through the wilderness and keeping us safe into God’s promised land. **Ultimately, Christ invites us to lay down our lives before Him through our confession and to check ourselves at the foot of the Cross.**

Through this journey in the wilderness of life, at times we may find ourselves feeling unease when we are displaced beyond our comfort zones. We may be challenged to take a bold leap of faith by crossing the boundary into our enemy’s territory. At times we may be asked to stretch our imagination beyond our expectations and taking risks and that’s OK. It is through these liminal spaces and moments of trials and challenges that we may dig deep into our souls and discover our true selves and of God’s unconditional grace and mercy. We come to learn more about not only who we are but whose we are under the sovereignty of our God.

Through our penitence and humbleness, **we stir our ashes and dusts with the living water of the Holy Spirit. God transforms us into this lump of clay to be molded and shaped by God into these earthen vessels, ready to be used by God.**

**This is what the season of Lent all about, as we painstakingly labor through our journey to the cross, while being led by the Spirit across the wilderness of life.** Let us give thanksto God for God’s grace and mercy. In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *Mark 1:13* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Mark 10:27* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Matthew 11:28-30* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Deuteronomy 8:3* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Deuteronomy 6:13* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *Deuteronomy 6:16* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)