

## 1st Sunday of Lent C

In the heat of the Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky affair, the head of a women's support group spoke on CNN. This is what she said, "Monica has done nothing wrong. In the world of corporate establishments and in the White House bureaucracy, women who want to advance must use everything at their disposal. If that is what she has done, we see absolutely nothing wrong with that." I wonder how many of us can go along with that. Anyone who believes in the gospel principles cannot agree with that. I cannot accept that because that goes against the basic moral principle which says that the end does not justify the means. It is like saying it is okay to rob a bank to help someone. It is like saying that it is okay to use someone to make you happy or advance your goal. This is something we see in the world all the time.

On the first Sunday of Lent, we are presented with the temptations of Jesus in the wilderness. We may ask why? The answer is that temptations come to us every day of our lives. If Jesus had to face temptations, we will have to face much more of that in various ways every day. We are surrounded by temptations on all sides. Some of them are so enticing, others are couched in beautiful appearances, and still others are so subtle that we hardly recognize them. Biblical scholars interpret the temptations of Jesus as a dramatic representation of the inner struggle against temptations that Jesus faced throughout his public life. It was basically a temptation to use whatever it takes to get what he wanted. This is the philosophy of the world that some people live by. But, as Christians, we cannot live by this principle.

The three temptations that Jesus faced were to change stone into bread, to fall down and worship the devil, and to jump down from the pinnacle of the temple to prove that he was the Son of God. If you put them into broad categories, those were temptations of the flesh, temptations of power and riches, and temptations of pride.

The first temptation was not just to satisfy physical hunger, but to use his power to satisfy himself. There is a constant temptation to use all we have to find pleasure and satisfaction. If it gives you pleasure, do it. That is the jargon we hear. Jesus overcame that temptation. He did not use his powers for himself, but he used it for others—he fed the five thousand.

In the second temptation, Satan offers Jesus an easy way to establish the kingdom of God on earth. It was mainly a temptation to become the political messiah in line with Jewish expectations, to use all the material things and powers of the world, and to avoid suffering on the cross. There is always a temptation in us to cling to power. It is very human to cling to power and to want to die in office. But our holy father, Pope Francis, has set a great example of humility by paving the way for someone else to lead the Church. It is not anything new in Church history. It has happened a few times before. The first time was in the year 235 (St. Pontian), and the last time was in the year 1415 (Gregory XII). In the second temptation, the devil was enticing Jesus away from his real mission on the cross by offering him worldly power. Jesus overcame that.

A minister parked his car in a "no-parking zone" in a large city because he was short of time and couldn't find a space with a meter. Then he put a note under the windshield wiper that read: "I have circled the block 10 times. If I don't park here, I'll miss my appointment. Forgive us our trespasses." When he returned, he found a citation from a police officer along with this note: "I've circled this block for 10 years. If I don't give you a ticket, I'll lose my job. Lead us not into temptation."

In the third temptation, the devil led Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple and said, "If you are the son of God, throw yourself down." Here the devil is asking Jesus to put God to test. He wanted Jesus to prove that he was truly the son of God by a sensational sky-dive without a rope or parachute. There are times when we put God to test. We say, "God, if you love me, give me this or that; God, if you are there, heal me." The devil was asking Jesus to use his supernatural powers to convince the people that he was the Son of God. "Do all you can to get the people to recognize you as the Messiah." Jesus rejected that temptation. Like Jesus, we are beset with temptations. We can conquer every temptation with prayer, sacraments and penance. To overcome some temptations, fasting is essential. Jesus was able to overcome the temptations easily because he had fasted and prayed for forty days. Let the time of Lent that we begin be a time of prayer, doing penance, and fasting.