

1st Sunday of Lent – C
February 21, 2010 – Holy Angels Church
Homilist: Rev. Roland M. LaPlante
Readings: Deut 26:4-10; Rom 10:8-13; Lk 4:1-13

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST: If a survey were to be taken today that asked people how they resisted temptation...what methods or means they used to overcome seductions to sin...undoubtedly, a variety of answers would be given. For example: “I try to distract myself by thinking of something else,” or “I make the Sign of the Cross and say a quick prayer like ‘God, help me!’” or “Sometimes an hour of jogging and a cold shower work wonders,” or even, “Well, to be perfectly honest, that’s my problem, I DON’T resist temptation.”

I’m reminded of the boy whose father ordered him not to go swimming in the canal near their home. But he came home that evening carrying a wet bathing suit. “Where’ve you been?” demanded his father. “Swimming in the canal,” the boy answered honestly. “Didn’t I tell you not to swim there?” asked the father. “Yes, sir,” answered the boy. “Then why did you do it?” he asked. “Well, dad,” he explained, “I had my bathing suit with me and I couldn’t resist the temptation.” “Why did

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you take your bathing suit with you?” the father asked. “So, I’d be prepared to swim,” the boy replied, “just in case I was tempted.” Jesus was prepared to **resist** temptation; but we, like that boy, are often prepared to give in to it. Today’s Gospel shows us just how Jesus did that...it was simply by quoting a Scripture passage.

As the story goes, each time the devil tempted Jesus, Jesus responded with a Scripture quotation. So, when the devil told the hungry, fasting Jesus to “command this stone to turn into bread,” Jesus said, “It is written: *One does not live on bread alone.*” When the devil next offered to give Jesus all the power and the glory of the world’s kingdoms, Jesus again said, “It is written: *You shall worship the Lord, your God, and him alone shall you serve.*”

So successful was Jesus’ method of quoting Scripture to resist temptation that the devil tried it himself to make his third temptation

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even more enticing. So, he supported his invitation for Jesus to throw himself off the top of the Temple by saying: “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written: *He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you, and, With their hands they will support you, lest you dash your foot against a stone.*” The devil seemed to think that two could play this Scripture-quoting game.

As clever as he was and continues to be, the devil was no match for Jesus, however, who responded: “It also says, *You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.*”

Judging by the complete success of Jesus’ way of resisting temptation, his method comes highly recommended. But the problem is that most Catholics don’t know Scripture well enough to use it in battling temptation. For those of you old enough to remember the Baltimore Catechism, you know you spent a lot of time memorizing Catechism

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answers...not Scripture. Presently, children memorize very little since the emphasis is less on memorization today and more on discussion, or other education methods.

This means that if it ever came to a shoot-out with the devil, our supply of ammunition would be pretty inadequate. There are so many situations today that are vague and we don't know what's right and what's wrong. The more we know about scripture, the better able we'll be to know what the Scriptures has to say about a situation.

So let me suggest to you a special Lenten project, namely the reading of Scripture...perhaps even memorizing a few of the passages that seem especially pertinent to your life. And we could begin with the three passages Jesus used in today's Gospel: "One does not live on bread alone"... "God alone shall you serve"...and "You shall not put the lord, your God, to the test."

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These three solid sentences are able to do what the whole season of Lent seeks to accomplish in us, namely, to keep God first in our lives. The first quotation reminds us that God is the ultimate source of our life and nourishment. Secondly, we adore God alone, because only God is all-worthy of our adoration and allegiance. And finally, we don't play around with temptation thinking that God will protect us no matter what we do.

When we've got those three verses down, we might add the refrain from today's Responsorial Psalm: "Be with me, Lord, when I am in trouble." Here's a clear cry for help when times get hard and we're in trouble.

Having said all this, I want to remind you that when Jesus used these Scripture quotes to defeat the devil, it was after having spent forty days in the desert fasting and praying. My point is, that it's not really enough just to know and quote Scripture...even the devil can do that. More is

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required...in fact, frequent prayer and other spiritual exercises are needed to back up Scripture quoting. The devil knew he was defeated because he could see that Jesus **lived** the Scriptures. **We'll** defeat him too, but only if we truly live the Scriptures in our lives.

I was thinking of Bob Steele when I was writing this homily...Do you remember him? He used to have a “Word for the day,” on his radio program. Perhaps we could call this exercise “A Bible quote a day keeps the devil away!” In this Mass, let's decide to take Scripture seriously, and really let it work its wonders in our lives.