

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

1st Sunday of Lent | For Sunday, March 10th, 2019

Resisting Temptation

Written by Rev. Mark Suslenko

Deuteronomy 26:4-10

Romans 10:8-13

Luke 4:1-13



Our Church and our world are going through painful times. For our Church, the ongoing revelations of the sex abuse crisis are disturbing, discouraging, and sad. Feelings of betrayal and anger are commonly expressed, and many are disillusioned, lacking joy and without a concrete sense of hope. For our world, there are still great conflicts and so much discord and unhappiness. People are struggling: to have food, make a decent living, live in safety, and find a home. Wars and divisions go on, and tensions are escalating. There is a lack of trust deepening both in the Church and in world leadership. What is truth? Pilate asked Jesus that very question.

In the midst of these unsettling times, our faith calls us to focus more acutely on our relationship with God and how we may have wandered from that relationship. With all that is going on around us, especially in the Church that once had our complete unwavering allegiance, it is easy to just walk away and look elsewhere for "truth" if it can be found in any other place. Human weakness and sinfulness has a way of turning us away from where we really want and need to be. This is true not only for each of us personally, but communally as well. There is a real temptation to simply throw our hands up in the air and focus our attention on something more immediate and fulfilling that seemingly makes more sense.

That is a temptation we must resist for God's sake and our own. While we may not be directly responsible for the "sins of the Fathers," the pain of their sins makes its way into our hearts. The knowledge of their occurrence has changed the way we think and perceive things, especially about the Church and Her clergy. While this is definitely a clerical problem, it has taken us off our axis and forced us to question what is really true.

Jesus faced that same question in the desert when he was tempted with relief from the human hungers for food, power, and ultimate authority. Our past experiences quickly reveal that it is very easy to give into temptation. Is that not part of the reason we find ourselves in our current mess? We cannot fear or hide from the truth, whether that is the personal truths about ourselves or ultimate "truth." We may not realize it, but we need to be brought back home, healed, and reconciled. Lent is a

perfect time to take a deep breath, acknowledge where we have been and where we are, and refocus and reflect on where we can be.

God's merciful love is real. And the Church, for all of its flaws, is far greater than the human beings who labor in its vineyard. There is a life and treasure in the Church that can bring depth and light to a human heart in a way that nothing earthly is able to do. The riches of its Scriptures and the traditions of its faith are tremendous wellsprings for wisdom and guidance. As Jesus relied totally on God when he was tempted in the desert, so, too, can we this Lent. We also cannot forget that there are still wonderful people in the community of the Church, people and leaders who sincerely want to remain committed to God and the Gospel. The credible companions on our journey far outweigh those who have betrayed our trust.

The response to our psalm cannot be more apropos: "Be with me, Lord, when I am in trouble." We are in trouble, and God is with us. We cannot forget, as St. Paul reminds us, that the living Word of God is near us. It is so near that it is in our mouths and in our hearts. We need to clear away some of the clutter and distractions, however seemingly important and real they may be. If we can find some quiet undistracted space, we will know that what God says is true. God is within every being and thing He has created in a most intimate way. What is good and true about the Church and our faith can help us discover this wonder within.

This year, we need the purification of Lent more so than ever. The pain of the past can lead us to more hopeful futures, even though it is difficult to confront and acknowledge it. God gives us three powerful virtues, each of which is a manifestation and extension of His very presence: faith, hope, and love. We are never without these. No matter how sinful and crazy life can become, these virtues can always be found. There are always opportunities to fall into faith, walk with joy and hope, and live more abundantly in love. What beauty is to be found in the One who is without time and without end! Perhaps if we truly experience a holy Lent, God will be able to show us what true freedom and life are all about.

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PRAYER

Late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient,
ever new, late have I loved you!

You were within me, but I was outside,
and it was there that I searched for you.

In my unloveliness I plunged into the lovely things which you created.

You were with me, but I was not with you.

Created things kept me from you;
yet if they had not been in you they would not have been at all.

You called, you shouted, and you broke through my deafness.

You flashed, you shone, and you dispelled my blindness.

You breathed your fragrance on me;

I drew in breath and now I pant for you.

I have tasted you, now I hunger and thirst for more.

You touched me, and I burned for your peace.

— from the "Confessions of St. Augustine"