

Rev. Jeff Nicolas
Deuteronomy 26:4-10
Romans 10:8-13
Luke 4:1-13

1ST SUNDAY IN LENT
February 20-21, 2010
“The Road to Compassion”

Today we begin a forty day journey together; a journey with the Gospel of Luke into the compassion of God... understanding it, entering into it, being shaped by it, sharing it with others.

This is not going to be an easy trip. So why even begin? Because we, like the ancient Israelites of Egypt, are slaves. We are not yet the clear reflections of God’s love that we are created to be, baptized to become.

As Linda said so well last Wednesday, “We are closed to certain ideas, we have prejudices toward particular people or situations, we don’t have patience to listen to the complaints of our loved ones, we don’t quite do what really makes our bodies healthy, we react in anger and jealousy, we don’t take responsibility for our reactions, we miss the point, we value possessions too much.” In short, we are enslaved and God wants to free us from everything that holds us back from becoming fully who we are created to be, baptized to become.

How do we find this Promised Land? We follow the path Jesus Christ showed us through his life among us... the path of God’s compassion.

The first step of this journey to freedom within God’s compassion begins with paying attention; opening our eyes and hearts and really seeing (really knowing) our neighbor, our enemy, our nemesis, our self. Once we really see and recognize where a person is, empathy can arise and we “feel” with the other; then from feeling with the other, we can grow to want to help them; then compassionate acts can evolve. Then, like the farmers who plant the seed and then witness the wheat grow (they know not how), we can become a new person with new attitudes, new energy, and new possibilities. All beginning with a first step: paying attention.

But make no mistake; the devil does not want us to make this journey. Temptations are tossed in our way. Exit ramps that lead to nowhere are at every turn along this road, especially at the beginning before we can pick up any momentum.

Jesus' ministry likewise began with temptations; temptations that never went away but only intensified throughout his ministry until they reached their zenith at the cross. He faced the devil in the desert; the same tempter we face at the beginning of our journey. We just need to recognize the devil's voice. With what might the devil's voice be tempting us?

- (1) **(TEMPTATION ONE): You are invited this Lent to enter into God's compassion and experience transformation in yourselves and your relationships.** But really, you don't need to worship God or walk with a community of faith to do that! You have the power within you already. After all, don't you already have a relationship with Jesus? It would be quicker and more controlled if you just went on this journey alone. Go out and buy a couple of self-help books at Barnes & Noble. Then you can work on this "transformation" thing when you have time, between all the other really important things you have to do. Take care of your own longing for a deeper existence with God and neighbor. Fill your own hunger. "Command this stone to become bread." Feed yourself.
- (2) **(TEMPTATION TWO): You are invited this Lent to enter into God's compassion and experience transformation in yourselves and your relationships.** But watch out, you will lose yourself! Your enemy will take advantage. Right now you hold all the cards. You have the upper hand. If you show any weakness, he will move in to secure his position. If you show anything less than total resolve, she will see it as an opportunity to hurt you again. Cling to your principles, your power, your past, your prestige, your perspective. You are in the right after all. What you need is more power and glory, and then they will all have to come around to your point of view. "I shall give to you all this power and glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I may give it to whomever I wish." Power is the answer.
- (3) **(TEMPTATION THREE): You are invited this Lent to enter into God's compassion and experience transformation in yourselves and your relationships.** But isn't this something God wants for you anyway? You don't have to do all this hard work. If God wants transformation for you, then it should just happen. Why mess with something that will eventually just work itself out. You don't need to pay attention to that jerk. You don't need to look into yourself. Let's use this as an opportunity to test God's will for you. If God wants you to transform, then let God do it. After all, "God will command the angels concerning you, to guard you, and with their hands they will support you, lest you dash your foot against a stone." You shouldn't have to do anything.

It seems to me that the devil doesn't have a great variety of temptations from which to pull. Most often it is different words, but the same melody. Jesus, our companion and guide, faced the devil's temptations and turned the temptations into an opportunity to say "yes" to God and what God wanted to do through him. Today we have the same opportunity.

At the Rite of Election Saturday morning our three candidates for full initiation into our faith (Yolanda, Lana, and Sofia) were blessed by Archbishop Kurtz for their final approach to Easter over the next forty days. He told this story:

There was a mom who told her two sons, ages five and three, that she was going to cook pancakes for them for breakfast, their favorite. The boys were very excited. The only hitch, as the Mom explained, was that she could only prepare one serving of pancakes at a time so one of the brothers was going to get their pancakes before the other. She went on to say to them that if Jesus was here, he would let the other get their pancakes first, because that is the kind thing to do. Hearing this the five year old turned to his little brother, and with all sincerity said, "Tommy, you be Jesus."

As we enter our Lenten journey of compassion and transformation, tempted away from the path by the devil, our Church says to us, "You be Jesus." Then, with Jesus, we will lose our old self and find a new life.