

1st Sunday of Lent - A - 2020
Genesis 2.7-9;3.1-7///Romans 5.12-19///Matthew 4.1-11

→People danced in the streets...strangers embraced each other, as if they were members of one large family at a reunion....

→old men wept, youngsters exchanged high-fives, children watched in wide-eyed wonder as the city erupted into unfettered joy...unleashed by so many years of torment and disappointment

→*The curse has been broken...*they chanted...and it was true....at last the dreaded curse had been reversed...the Boston Red Sox had won the 2004 World Series.

(maybe some day we too...who are Cleveland sports fans...will know that same feeling)

→“Cursed”...have you ever felt that way.....as if something or someone was tracking your every step, haunting your life with whispers of past failure, robbing you of your hopeful dreams and your inner peace?

→for the Red Sox...it was the mythical curse that hung over the team ever since they traded Babe Ruth to the Yankees almost a century ago....for Cleveland... some say it was the Rocky Colavito trade that began the curse on Cleveland....

PAUSE....

→[regardless]....it might cause us to ask...if we have ever felt cursed....I don't mean cursed in the voodoo magic sense with someone sticking pins in an image of a doll...

→but rather.....a sense of “curse” from our own past failures...

→some people feel that they can never outrun the shadow of their sins....the scars from a shattered family...the soiled reputation from a foolish teenage decision...the trauma of a broken relationship...

→some mistakes have a way of hanging around...like an albatross around our neck or a scarlet letter on our chest.....whether public or private...they tend to follow and remain with us...

→and as a result we often feel cursed by our sins...doomed to repeat them...trapped forever in a cell of our own making...

PAUSE

→today our scripture readings speak to this condition...and to its solution

→our first reading from Genesis presents us with the story of creation when God "formed us from the dust of the ground."

→we follow Adam and Eve in their struggle against temptation and the shame they experienced after their fall from grace

→in the second reading, Paul speaks of the consequences of that fall and elaborates on how the power of one person's choice resulted in sin and death for all:

→[we hear]/////////"just as sin came into the world through one person, and death came through sin, so death spread to all, because all have sinned."

→however, Paul also goes on to show how the presence of Christ and obedience to God has also transformed sin and death into grace and new life.

→and finally in the gospel, we hear about Jesus submitting to temptation as he was led by the Spirit into the desert to be put to the test

→we hear [about] Jesus being tempted to satisfy the demands of the body, to satisfy his faith in God, and to satisfy the desire for worldly splendor

----the temptations that Jesus faced in today's gospel reading are often the same one's that you and I face in our own lives as well

---yet he was able to resist them, to turn away from them and by doing so...Jesus became a changed person...a different person...a person with a renewed heart.....

---how we deal with temptation in our lives...and how we resist and avoid them, how we turn away from them, as Christ did, will also result in you and me becoming a changed person....a different person...a person with a renewed heart [as well].

PAUSE

→Lent is a special time in the Church year for us to deal with the various temptations of our lives

---a time to reflect on the temptations and sins we experience.....in whatever form they may be

----and to begin to turn away from them, to resist and avoid them

→the purpose of Lent [as I see it]...is two-fold...

→[first]...it is about penance...realizing what we have done wrong...and getting rid of those habits, attitudes, thoughts and actions...we don't like about ourselves...

→and [second]... it is about conversion...changing and growing in our faith life...turning back and renewing our relationship with God.

→and both of these –penance and conversion – need to go hand in hand if we are going to truly capture the meaning of Lent...

→this is the message of our readings today: reform your lives (penance) and believe in the Good News (conversion)

→and so today I would like to offer this challenge to you and to myself for this Lent...

→I would challenge you to give something up for Lent that is going to lead to a conversion in your life...--to growth...and rediscovery...

→so...I don't want you to give up a **“thing”** for Lent...rather I want to challenge all of us to conversion...

→and so instead of giving up chocolate or ice cream...I challenge us to heal the hurt of anger and jealousy that we may have...

→instead of giving up going out to eat...I challenge us to heal our grudges...

→instead of giving up candylet's give up stubbornness...

→instead of giving up junk food...let us heal the hard-hearts and bitterness we sometimes have

→instead of giving up TV...how about instead we give up talking about one another

→instead of focusing on the negativity of our lives, perhaps we should embrace and foster the positive in all of us....

→in a word....instead of giving into our temptations....what if we begin to deal with those things in our lives that need to be changed....so that our journey to Easter, our journey to eternal life...might be filled with joy

PAUSE

→once again.....we have been graced with this holy season of lent....a time for change of heart.....a time to change the way we live ///// the way we think /// the way we are with one another

→the time to follow Christ by example, by deed and by prayer...

→these are the Lenten Blessings that Await us....

PAUSE

→the story of Jesus' temptation in the desert is put before us at the beginning of Lent to encourage us to follow his example

→temptation is all around us...it is part of our everyday life....but Lent is also a part of who we are....providing us the opportunity to make a difference in our lives and in the lives of those around us

→may this Lent be a TIME for us rise from the ashes we put on our forehead this past week and begin a changed way of living

→the curse was eventually lifted from the Boston Red Sox...some day it might even happen to our beloved Cleveland teams....

→but for now...it is happening to you and me...through fasting, prayer and sacrifice may the curse of our sinfulness be lifted and broken

...→and may the Lenten Blessings that await us....bring about a change in all of us resulting in a joyful journey to Easter and eternal life.