

1ST SUNDAY OF LENT (C) CREATE IN ME A CLEAN HEART

Why is Lent an important season for you? What is required of you as a Catholic? We are told by the Church to fast, pray, and give alms, but how is that going to benefit you as an individual? Very often, some of us think that the season is for a select few. But the temptation of Jesus is a reminder that a Christian is to prepare always because “your enemy, the devil roams around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour,” (1Pet.5:8). You and me are the ones he is looking for.

This period is in line with the forty days Jesus fasted and prayed in the desert. But it also reminds us of the forty years the Israelites spent in the desert on their way to the promised land, the forty days Moses spent on Mt. Horeb with the Lord, and the forty days Elijah journeyed to Mt. Horeb, after eating a piece of cake and drinking a jug of water, to meet the Lord, among other events which took place in the lives of the Israelites.

Thus, these forty days of Lent are a journey of faith asking the Lord to create a new heart in us. Like the Israelites, we are to express our thanks to God for what He has done for us and to express our dependence on Him. This is prayer. It is presenting ourselves to Him like the first fruits in the hands of the Jews to be set before the altar of God. We are wanderers on this earth as they were, and so we have to take refuge in Him.

This time is also a period of self-abandonment, that is, doing away with things which are pleasurable but take us away from God. In this season we are called upon to discipline our senses - sight, feeling, taste, and touch. This is what fasting is all about. We are to check what we watch, measure what we taste, and control our sense of touch. We are to tame the tongue and close our ears to certain chats and conversations. We are called upon also to build good relationships with everybody, especially those who give us a lot of trouble. This can be termed as ‘almsgiving’. The other person’s needs become your needs, as St. Paul told the Romans: “Bless your persecutors, never curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. Give the same consideration to all others alike. Pay no regard to social standing; be at peace with everyone,” Rom.12:14-18).

The devil’s wish is that I don't become a faithful priest. He does not want

you to be a faithful wife or husband; he does not want you to have a united and peaceful family; he is bringing confusion between siblings, relatives and friends; he does not want you to be a faithful Catholic. That is what he wanted to do with Jesus; to make Him forget about doing the Father's will. Abraham, Job, and David were all put to the test, so it is with all who profess faith in God. But St. Paul says: "None of the trials which have come upon you is more than a human being can stand. You can trust that God will not let you be put to the test beyond your strength, but with every trial will also provide a way out by enabling you to put up with it," (1Cor.10:13).

From the heart comes all evil intentions, that was why David asked the Lord to create in him a clean heart. This is the time to ask the Lord to help us remove all dirt from our hearts, as we heard that "everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved". We are to "watch and pray that we may not undergo the test," (Mk.14:38).

The fasting and prayer should help us have a change of heart and grow closer to the Lord. If not then this season will be like the past ones. Then our fasting and abstinence will be hunger strike; we will not gain the graces we are expected to receive.

Think about your weaknesses, that is what the devil is going to use against you. "Stand up to him strong in faith," (1Pet.5:9a).