



Bringing Home the Word

First Sunday of Lent (A)

March 1, 2020

Sin and Redemption

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

One thing today’s readings—and really all of Scripture—make abundantly clear is that the devil exists. He is a liar and a deceiver, just as he was for our first parents and for Jesus as well. This is good to keep in mind at the beginning of Lent. We need a conversion of heart because the devil tempts us. We are sinners. Sin is real. The story of original sin illuminates the failure of Adam and Eve, and the reading from Romans explains that that sin has reached us. In the Sistine Chapel fresco, *Original Sin and Banishment from the Garden of Eden*, Michelangelo paints the devil as a serpent with a human upper

body to accent that the devil is a person. All humanity is wounded and weakened by sin.

Yet even if sin and the devil are realities, the good news is that they are not the strongest realities. Jesus, as he shows us in the Gospel, is stronger than the enemy, and he shares that strength with us. We can be new creations through the salvation and forgiveness Jesus offers. His obedience can make us righteous.

During Lent, we try to purify our heart with God’s grace so we freely choose righteousness. Our actions reveal another reality of the good news: our choices make a difference. God trusts us so much that he gives us free will and allows us to play a part in our own salvation. Accepting his grace is the first step toward victory over sin. That is why your Lenten fasts and promises are such game changers—they strengthen your will, purify your heart, and make you more like Jesus. +

Sunday Readings

Genesis 2:7–9; 3:1–7

The snake said to the woman: “You certainly will not die! God knows well that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened.”

Romans 5:12–19 or 5:12, 17–19

Through one righteous act acquittal and life came to all.

Matthew 4:1–11

Jesus answered [the devil], “Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.’”

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He is a liar and a deceiver,
just as he was
for our first parents
and for Jesus.*

A Word from Pope Francis

There are three temptations of Christ....First, wealth: seizing hold of goods destined for all and using them only for “my own people.” That is, taking “bread” based on the toil of others or even at the expense of their very lives. That wealth tastes of pain, bitterness, and suffering.

—Homily in Mexico, February 14, 2016



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Have I prayed about what God wants me to give up or take on in Lent?
- What resolutions will help me love God more?

Lent: Have You Given Up on Giving Up Stuff?

By Susan Vogt

A year ago, I was facing Lent—again. I was ready to repeat my annual routine: no sweets or complaining, extra prayer, and the usual fasting and abstinence. I realized, though, that I wasn't growing or being challenged. I decided to find a practice that would remind me daily of this penitential season and join me to Jesus' sacrifice of giving his life for others.

What if I gave away one thing a day for the forty days of Lent? I wanted to live a simpler lifestyle both for spiritual reasons and to declutter my life. I decided to take this on as a challenge—hoping it would clean out not only my closets but also my soul.

The Plan

I started my Lenten giveaway with shoes. I'm not a big shoe collector—or so I thought. According to Soles4Souls (soles4souls.org), the average American owns fourteen pairs of shoes. I figured I was under that and could go lower. Wrong. When I added up my shoes, it came to thirty pairs. I was horrified! I pruned it down to fourteen.

I moved to clothes. I had many clothes that I seldom wear. I discovered that I had enough extras to give more than one thing away a day and could go by categories.



I started with the letter “S”—shirts, skirts, suits, slacks, sweaters, and scarves—and gathered up all the old-fashioned or makes-me-look-fat garments. I pulled out about seven items for each “S,” creating breathing room in my closet. I felt pretty good about this pruning but ran into a problem.

What Do I Do with the Stuff?

At first I just collected my intended giveaways in a corner. But then my stuff started overflowing and getting in the way. In addition to giving things to charities, neighbors, and friends, I discovered Freecycle (freecycle.org) and Vietnam Veterans of America (pickupsforvets.org) who pick up at your home. My most satisfying experience was trying to get rid of an adult potty seat, the one item not claimed in my “Free Yard Sale.” A woman going to visit an elderly neighbor saw the seat and said, “The lady I'm visiting could use that!” She picked it up and went on her happy way.

What's this Got to Do with Lent and Spirituality?

I harkened back to my early religious education, remembering that Sunday isn't an official day of Lent. It's a day of rest and rejoicing, not penance. I decided not to give away anything on Sundays,

but rather to use the time to ponder how this experience was changing me: *Was I becoming less attached? Was it a holy sacrifice or simply a way to clean my house?*

Just as Jesus was stripped of his clothes before his crucifixion, I found myself stripping away excess clothes and household items to focus on what's most important in life: being generous and caring for those in need.

How has It Changed Me?

Although I haven't achieved total humility, I did stretch myself to think daily about the abundance I have instead of what I lack. I'm more aware of how to share what I have with others—even if it pinches. I remind myself that my importance isn't dependent on what I own. I feel more solidarity with those who are economically poor.

I now shop differently. When tempted to buy something because it's such a bargain, I consider: Do I really need this? Is it something I will eventually give away? Is there someone I can buy it for who needs it more than me?

Remember, eventually we'll all return to dust. The stuff of our lives just collects dust and makes it harder to prepare for that final journey. +

PRAYER

Lord, deepen my awareness of and respect for your presence in creation and in the people around me.

—From *Mindful Meditations for Every Day of Lent and Easter*, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

March 2–7

Monday, Lenten Weekday:
Lv 19:1–2, 11–18 / Mt 25:31–46

Tuesday, Lenten Weekday:
Is 55:10–11 / Mt 6:7–15

Wednesday, Lenten Weekday:
Jon 3:1–10 / Lk 11:29–32

Thursday, Lenten Weekday:
Est C:12, 14–16, 23–25 / Mt 7:7–12

Friday, Lenten Weekday:
Ez 18:21–28 / Mt 5:20–26

Saturday, Lenten Weekday:
Dt 26:16–19 / Mt 5:43–48