**1st SUNDAY OF LENT [9th March, 2014]**

READINGS: Genesis 2:7-9; 3:1-7 / Romans 5:12-19 / Matthew 4:1-11

THEME: TEMPTATIONS

By Very Rev. Fr. John Louis ([http://frlouis.com](http://frlouis.com/))

Today is the first Sunday of lent, a period of forty days of spiritual preparation for the commemoration of Christ’s suffering, death and resurrection at Easter. Christ suffered and died because of our sins. But what comes before a sin? Temptation! So on this first Sunday of Lent, the Church wants us to consider the issues of TEMPTATION and sin, and then seek the grace to overcome them.

Alexander Pope says: ‘to err is human, to forgive divine.’ Similarly, one can say that ‘to be tempted is human, not to sin is divine.’ That is, all of us are prone to temptation and sin. What is temptation, then? Let us begin with an illustration: a fisherman uses a worm as bait. This attracts or entices the fish. The fish sees food, something apparently good for it, but in the end it means a trap and death for it. That is how temptation works on us. Adam and Eve were promised by the tempter that if they took the fruit of the tree, their eyes would be opened; and indeed their eyes were opened like the eyes of a hooked fish!

What then did Adam and Eve gain when they fell into temptation? – *Deportation* from God’s garden (God’s glorious presence), nakedness (i.e. shame) and death (like a hooked fish). Christ Jesus (the new Adam: *cf*. Rom. 5:14), by becoming human, was tempted like the old Adam. Yet there is a big difference between Jesus (the new Adam) and the old Adam: Jesus did not sin because He is divine.

THE FIRST TEMPTATION, according to the gospel reading, was for Jesus to turn stones into bread. This meant that He was tempted to use His power/position for selfish gains, or to ‘bribe’ people to become His followers. The good news is that Jesus resisted and overcame this temptation by making the WORD of His FATHER paramount: ‘Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word God’ (Deut. 8:3; Mt. 4:4). Unlike Jesus, often when we are tempted to use our power/position for selfish gains, we succumb.

THE SECOND TEMPTATION required Jesus to be sensational or to put God to the test by jumping down from the pinnacle of the Temple (Mt. 4:5-6). Again, Jesus overcame this temptation by putting GOD FIRST – and not to the TEST. Priests and other pastors can fall to the temptation of being sensational: instead of leading people to God, we may – due to the desire for wealth and fame – attract them to ourselves (through performing miracles, sometimes, originating from occult practices or fetish rituals). Furthermore, since students do not have the mandate to examine their teachers, we should avoid putting God to the test. We should, for instance, avoid always looking for signs and wonders before believing in God.

IN THE THIRD TEMPTATION, the devil showed Jesus all the earthly kingdoms and promised to give them to Jesus if He worshipped him (Mt. 4:8). Thus, Jesus was tempted to worship a ‘god’ other than His Father, or to compromise on His faith and mission, but He did not give in. Unfortunately, we sometimes – in difficult times or in search of wealth and fame – abandon our faith in the One Living God. There are times we also compromise on our Christian faith and principles. A young lady in search of a job, for instance, may compromise on her principle of chastity. And a young man may give in to the temptation of getting rich quick through money laundering or ‘sakawa’ (occult means).

Beloved in Christ, whether in times of plenty (like the old Adam in the glorious garden of Eden) or in times of want (like the new Adam, Jesus, fasting and hungry in the wilderness), temptations may come our way. In all these circumstances, let us not be like the old Adam who succumbed to the desire of the flesh, but like Jesus who submitted to the will of the Father. Finally, I pray that we will, by the power of Jesus, stand tall against every temptation, Amen!