

Homily. 1st Sunday of Lent. Year.C. 9/10 March 2019.

Lent begins by tacking us back to basics, to Christianity 101, because if we haven't got the basics right then the entire story of our salvation doesn't make much sense. It starts by introducing us to Satan who is a bully. Now, I've met my fair share of bullies in life as you can well imagine. The way bullies work is to get us to doubt our own power and value by using threats and enticements. If we give in to these threats, if we fall for these enticements, then we lose confidence in who we really and truly are, surrendering our power and ourselves into the bargain. When this happens, and it happens too much, evil gets a free run, fear rules and we become like slaves.

Satan came to Jesus after His Baptism, after the heavens were torn open and the Holy Spirit had come on Him like a dove, after the Divine voice had spoken saying that He was God's Son, the Beloved, upon whom God's favour rested. What the bully says is If, If, If you are the Son of God, then do this or that powerful work all for yourself. The pressure was on to Jesus to doubt Himself, to test and prove that what God had spoken was for real. The enticement was bread from stones for His hunger, powerful public displays of His specialness by jumping from the top of the Temple and power all for Himself over the world's kingdoms. The trick and trap in this ploy, as you can doubtless see, is that if Jesus had done any of these things He would have lost His identity and personhood in God by acting selfishly, the very opposite of God who is always sacrificial, self-giving and serving. If He had gone along with and given in to any of this bullying and trickery then He would have lost Himself by not acting as

the Son of God and evil would have flourished. This is how bullies always work; raising self-doubt and fear, enticing us with safety or some other gift that, if we accept the terms, tricks us into surrendering our own dignity and power to them.

Jesus shows us how to deal with bullies, with Satan and those on Satan's side. He shows us how to do as He did, by recalling who we really and truly are, God's sons and daughters, His own sisters and brothers, a people of faith called to live and act as such in the Church and the world. He quoted God's words back to Satan in response, affirming that He is the Word of God made flesh, beloved before God. He kept Himself intact, neither enticed, fooled or tricked and so He maintained His own power as God for us, the servant of our salvation.

When the bully has a go at us this is what we're to do. If we do get sucked in, falling for the bullies disempowering tactics, we have our way out. We start at the beginning going back to our Baptism, back to who we really are, which is God's sons and daughters, a truth about ourselves that is affirmed and strengthened by us here in every Eucharist. We take back the power we gave away by standing up confidently to the bully, relying on God's grace to make our stumbling, stressful efforts successful. What's more, we can rely on God to help us help ourselves out of this mess we've gotten into because Jesus is by our side showing us the way to reclaim the freedom, dignity and empowerment that is rightfully ours as children of God. This is where our Lent begins because getting this right sets the scene for all that God is doing for us in God's Son, the Beloved, our brother.