

Homily. 1st Sunday in Lent. Year. A. 25/26 February 2023.

These readings for our 1st Lenten Sunday lay out our options through a process of compare and contrast. In the desert wilderness, fasting and praying, the Devil, serpent and trickster, emerged. Like a super smart salesperson he pushed his shiny products, all the while hiding from Jesus their flaws and traps. They are really the same old junk; material comfort, fame and adulation from the masses and power and glory over others, this time wrapped up in some new tin foil that appeals to the eye. They offer what Jesus may have liked and wanted, what we like, find attractive and seem to want. In contrast though, Jesus sticks firmly by what is essential and needed, to what matters most deeply; the integrity of his call and mission, his fidelity to his word and honouring his promise to God to use gifts his not for himself but for others, for the betterment of us all.

In the 2nd reading St. Paul uses the same compare and contrast process, trying to help us to work out what matters. The first people, represented by Adam and Eve, got suckered by Satan. They fell for the trick and bought the lie. The forbidden fruit looked so good, offering something they thought that they wanted, a god-like knowledge. However, when they bit into it there was a worm at its centre, a rottenness that brought them shame and made them sick. Paul says that this sickness went on to effect us all, every one of us who are children of the man and the woman. Now embarrassed before each other they covered up, hiding from one another and even from God. Work, shame, pain, suffering and exile from our original union with God, each other and creation has ensued ever since.

What is to be done about this mess? How can we ever be healed and put right again? St. Paul says that we've already tried the way of obedience to laws. They're re a good idea, but the truth is that we end up breaking them, our human nature now being so flawed, our eyes and hearts now being so easily fooled and seduced. Well, Paul tells us, the first fault has ended up becoming a happy one for us because God chose to become one of us in Jesus, a new Adam, in order to rescue us. No matter anymore the depravity of our sin or the depth of our failures, we have a lifesaver who gives everything away to secure us and who, at no cost to ourselves, drags us back to the shore of God's merciful love. However great the fall, however deep the hole Adam and Eve dug and the sickness we've inherited, the new Man, Jesus Christ, is greater and stronger. His grace, his gift of himself for us, heals, restores and redeems us, if we will only acknowledge our need of saving and welcome his loving embrace.

Thus, the pattern of Lent laid out before us, our ongoing rescue mission by God in Jesus Christ. These 6 weeks ask us to get in touch with our brokenness, admitting how easily we keep on getting tricked by the sales pitch of the slippery snake and are made sicker by the wormy fruits that still attract the eyes of our minds and hearts. Then, acknowledging that we can't save ourselves from ourselves, turn our faces and minds to the One who in absolute goodness swims out into the rip and surf in order to bring us home, even if it costs him everything, which you and I know it already has. For sure, we're in a mess and are messed up, but the Good-News is that all is not lost. For, you see, its even more certain that everyone will come to reign in life who welcomes the free gift of mercy and rescue offered through the One New Man, Jesus Christ our saviour.