

Homily: 1st Sunday of Lent: Cycle A: 2023: Gen 2: 7-9; 3: 1-7; Ps 51; Rom 5: 12-19; Mt 4: 1-11

“Why is it such a life-long battle to live in Holiness?”

1. **Today’s readings tell us why.** We are in a spiritual battle as long as we live on earth. Objective **good and evil** are real. The **devil** is real, even though he usually disguises himself behind many masks in the modern world: the biggest one is tricking people into thinking he doesn’t really exist, and so he gets an easy foot into the door of their hearts and minds since their guard is down in relation to him. As we see in the Gospel today: Jesus came into the world to defeat the devil, to destroy his kingdom and to set man free from the curse of original sin. But each of us must freely cooperate with the Holy Spirit to benefit from this Gift of Jesus.
2. **The huge error of Adam and Eve:** Eve enters into a dialog with the devil - this led to first: her downfall spiritually, and then to her husband Adam falling into the same spiritual trap of sin. Remember the devil is much smarter than we are: he has an angelic intelligence which is higher than human intelligence, and according to Sacred Tradition he was the highest angel before he falls by his monstrous pride; as a result, his intelligence became darkened into falsehood, by rejecting God who is the source of all truth, but nonetheless the devil is still super-smart. Angelic intelligence immediately grasps the reality of a situation **intuitively**. Human intelligence on the other hand, even those of us who think we are really intuitive, needs an extra step to get in touch with reality, which is through our senses and through the process of **reasoning**: looking at cause and effect and drawing conclusions, which takes time for us to figure out. The devil knows that, so he tricks Eve by getting her off track in her sensory info and reasoning process by entering into a dialog of falsehood with her. **He is the master of lies.** Jesus says the devil is a *“liar from the beginning.”* **He always wraps up sin in a nice package.** In the case of Adam and Eve, he convinces them to forget what God told them about the tree of good and evil and makes God out to be an arbitrary tyrant who is keeping them from true happiness. Thus Eve says to herself, *“the tree is good for food, pleasing to the eyes and desirable for gaining wisdom”*; **her mistake in thinking** *is that she doesn’t reflect deeper than focusing on her*

*senses, and secondarily in her reasoning ability on the desirable but deceptive external package proposed by the devil in his dialog of falsehood with her: the tree looks desirable and the devil says it will lead to you being in charge instead of God - not realizing fully the nice external package - “of being in charge” - **contains the bitter fruit of death inside** - since we are not God but finite creatures created by the Lord, and so tragically Eve disobeys God in this serious matter and draws her husband Adam into this same tragic choice. **And the fall of man begins.** The message is: *our spiritual falls as humans always go back to the original temptation of the human race by the devil, namely to forget God and be “in charge.”* We encounter this same trick of the devil on a daily basis, sometimes in big ways, sometimes in small, but the bottom line is he is always whispering in our ears: “you can be like God.” – not in terms of holiness, but in raw power to do what you want to do. You should decide what is good and evil for you - don’t listen to God; don’t listen to the Catholic Church which speaks with God’s truth on matters of faith and morals, protected and guided by the Holy Spirit. No, the devil says: *you make your own path to “Heaven”* – when in fact it is like the fruit on the tree of knowledge containing death instead - this path proposed by the devil of “being in charge” leads not to Heaven, but is rather the wide path to HELL! Be self-willed - don’t be obedient to God - that is degrading to “your dignity” to decide for yourself. **BUT IN REALITY: THIS IS ONE BIG LIE FROM THE FATHER OF LIES, WITH ETERNAL CONSEQUENCES!***

3. **Lent is a special time to wake up to this reality of spiritual warfare!** Jesus battles the devil in the desert in the Gospel today to begin to undo the damage the first humans brought onto the human race and to the world through their tragic dialog with the devil. Jesus will win the ultimate victory, over the devil, sin, and the death that is the result of sin, on **the Cross**. Jesus can overcome the devil because He has His mind/ heart/ will prayerfully focused on His Heavenly Father. This is **the secret** to winning the war against sin, the devil, and fallen nature: to keep my soul fixed on God; to prayerfully bear my Cross with more love. A true conversion of heart is what the Lord wants for us. Let’s confidently ask for that!