

HOMILY 1ST SUN LENT YRA 2017

I think most of us have heard of the story “*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*” by Robert Louis Stevenson. Dr. Jekyll is a well respected gentleman in every way in his community. But he was tempted to act out some secret vices but he wanted to keep them hidden. So, late at night in his laboratory he devised a mystical potion that would allow him to change his physical appearance, to become Mr. Hyde, so that he could move about town practicing all of his vices, and no one would know it was him. Initially he was able to control these transformations, but eventually he was unable to control them, and ultimately Mr. Hyde took over all together. Dr. Jekyll was gone. What seemed to be a good idea at first, ended in disaster. Each of us has a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde within us. The question is who is going to play the dominant role in our character?

The readings today are all about temptation. In the first reading we hear about the first temptation of Adam and Eve. They were living in the Garden of Eden in complete happiness with all of their needs met. The only limitation they had was that they could not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God told them that if they ate from the tree they would surely die. The devil lied to them. He told them that God did not love them and if they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil they would become like God, but would surely not die. Eve saw that the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye and desirable for gaining wisdom, so she took some of the fruit and ate it, and so did Adam. How could they make such a bad decision? Notice that the devil did not force Adam and Eve disobey God. He tempted them by a lie that made something very bad appear good. And they bought the lie. This happens in our lives as well. We all make choices that are unhealthy in our lives. Why do we do that? Sometimes we just do not think. We make choices that appear good on the surface impulsively and do not think about the ramifications. Sometimes we stop and think about it, sometimes this stops us from making unhealthy choices, but sometimes we do it anyway. Thinking is not

enough. We can usually rationalize anything to ourselves if we want to. We need to pray about it. If we pray about it, we can usually identify the healthy choice. That is one of the differences between thinking and praying. Praying leads us to conclusions that we would not come up with on our own. In the Gospel reading we hear that Jesus went into the desert to pray and fast for 40 days before he began his public ministry. And then the devil tried to tempt him, but I do not think Jesus was really tempted at all. He could see through the illusion of goodness that the devil tried to present to him and saw each temptation for what it was, a bad choice. Adam and Eve could have done the same thing. If they would have prayed they would have seen how much God loved them because of the way he treated them and the way he provided for them. They had a wonderful relationship with God, were they going to jeopardize it for a piece of fruit? We can do this too in making choices, but we have to pray.

We need to invite God into all of our choices. Sometimes when we have been doing something repeatedly, it becomes habit and we no longer even think about it let alone pray about it. Do you think when the alcoholic or drug addict took the first drink or did drugs for the first time thought: "I am going to take my first step toward addiction today?" Maybe it was fun or seemed good the first time, but over time became a very bad habit. Or maybe I miss Mass one Sunday. I feel a little guilty, but nothing bad happens to me. It gets easier to do it next time I do not feel like going. Suddenly I have not been to church in 6 months, and maybe have not even thought about God for a long time let alone pray. Suddenly I am doing things I would never do when I was coming to Mass regularly and praying. Maybe I start taking my spouse for granted. I do not appreciate her the way I should. I speak in an abusive way to her. I do not apologize, she deserved it. The abuse becomes a terrible habit and out of control and my marriage begins to fall apart. Just like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. It seemed like a good idea at first. I thought I

could keep it under control. I thought I could keep it secret. But it became a terrible habit, and I may not recognize it for a long time.

Today on this first Sunday of Lent I am going to invite all of you to spend some time praying about what you are going to “give up” for Lent. Do not immediately give up sweets. Consider “giving up” one of those bad habits. We all have them. If we are honest with ourselves, we can readily identify what they are. What you decide to “give up” for Lent may be the first step to a new life, a better life. The temptations are not going to stop. If the Dr. Jekyll in us stays connected to Jesus, the Mr. Hyde will not be able to take over. Remember, there are two types of temptations in our lives, the temptation to do good and the temptation to do evil. I believe that the temptation to do good is stronger than the temptation to do evil. Is something missing in your life? Maybe you need to pray about the choices you are making.