

HOMILY 1ST SUN LENT YRB 2018

I read something very interesting this week about the famous writer Charles Dickens. When he wrote his novels, he wrote them in installments. Week after week he would release an installment to the English public who could not wait to see what was going to happen. Dickens said that when he started his stories he had no idea how they were going to end. He started with characters he made up, and they quickly took on a life of their own. He said that sometimes the characters made decisions that surprised even him. When I read this I could not help but think that is what God did when he created us. He created us in his own image with a free will to decide our own destiny. If we did not have a free will we would not be human. We would be robots that are simply doing what they were programmed to do. As human beings we are free to make decisions about what we do, the dreams we dream, what we do with our time. We are free to be all that we can be and we are also free to destroy the good in our lives.

In the Gospel reading, the Spirit drove Jesus into the desert where he remained for 40 days tempted by Satan. He never gave in to these temptations. Being in the desert there were no distractions. He was able to clearly see what the temptations were and who was doing the tempting so he was able to resist temptation. We are also tempted by Satan every day. However, we do not live in the desert. We have constant distractions, constant stimulation. Our culture is becoming increasingly secularized. We are influenced by the obvious problems in our culture: abortion, pornography, the casual attitude toward sexual activity, hooking up, friends with benefits, drug and alcohol and other addictions. There are also the problems that are a little more insidious: television programs that belittle and humiliate people and call it entertainment; the name calling and rude behavior we see in some of our public officials; The bullying and negativity on social media; the glamorizing of lust and greed; the advertising industry that is

trying to convince us that we need things that we do not need or want. With all of these negative influences in our lives, it is sometimes hard to discern what the temptations are, who is doing the tempting and it is becoming more and more difficult to resist.

In the first reading today we are reminded that God has a covenant with us. God's covenant does not depend upon our response to him. God is going to be with us loving and caring for us, regardless of what we do. Every time we see a rainbow we should be reminded of this covenant. If we stay connected with him, he will guide us to a good place. It is important that we stay connected to God in prayer. We should try and become more and more aware of God's presence with us every day, throughout the day. God did not create us and then leave us on our own. God is with us always, and he will help you to resist the temptations of Satan. Satan cannot enter your life unless you let him in. And God the creator is always more powerful than his creation, and Satan is part of God's creation. If we stay connected to God and allow ourselves to be guided by him we can be healthy, whole and fulfilled.

As we begin our Lenten journey, we are called to spend 40 days in the desert. We are called to make a fresh start in our lives. While most of us cannot literally go to the desert, we can simplify our lives. Use the three pillars of Lent, prayer, fasting and almsgiving to accomplish that. Fast from unhealthy choices and distractions. We should all consider limiting the time we spend on our phones and social media. With the time we save, spend a little more time praying. With the money we save, reach out and help someone. When we are tempted to sin, name the temptation, name the tempter, resist the temptation, and ask God for help resisting. We are free to choose the people we are to become.