

Saint Thomas' Church
Lent I
March 10, 2019
rmcneely+

Get thee hence Satan

Today's Gospel is interesting from several points of view

It is the only place in the New Testament
where the devil makes a personal appearance.

It is the first place in the Bible that Jesus is referred to as The Son
of God.

You see, there were people then
and people now
who do not believe Jesus is the Son of God,
But Lucifer, God's fallen angel
has always known who Jesus is,
even if some of us do not.

The Gospel is, of course well placed, on this First Sunday in Lent
Because even by now, only 4 days into Lent, we know
temptation.

It was April 21st, 1918.

Over France.

Mor-lan-court Ridge actually.

Manfred Freiherr von Richthofen, who you might know better as the
Red Barron,

Was flying his tri wing bright red Fokker fighter

World War I was raging

The Red Baron had flown many missions

And had brought down 80 aircraft

More than any other pilot of any country.

He was chasing Canadian Arthur Brown.

It would have been the Barron's 81st victory.

Brown was trying to evade and escape.

He flew near the ground and into Ally territory.
 But the Barron was closing on him.
 Then it happened.
 Investigations would never determine the gun that fired the shot
 But von Richthoffen was mortally wounded.
 Later analysis would prove that the Barron had chased temptation
 Too long
 Too far, and
 Too low into enemy territory
 And chasing temptation
 Too long
 Too far, and
 Too low into enemy territory
 Has caused the downfall of many good people.
 And as with von Richthoffen
 They are then caught
 Unawares
 With the consequences.
 Sin takes us
 Further than we ever wanted to go
 Costs more than we were ever willing to pay
 And hurts more than we ever dreamed it would.
 And it all starts with how we handle the temptations we face.

Jesus' 40 day fast in the wilderness was near completion when
 Satan, the tempter appeared.
 At the very time that Jesus was at His physically weakest point,
 the devil chose to strike.
 It was perhaps the devils best opportunity
 to derail what was to happen.
 Perhaps the last time
 to corrupt our Lord
 and prevent the salvation of mankind, three years hence.

The devil is like that,
 cunning,
 clever,
 and murderously destructive
And so he is in our lives.

Modern man,
 enlightened man,
 educated and sophisticated man
 scoffs at a real and embodied satan,
 that he prowls our lives looking for whom he will devour.

Well, call me an ignorant fool,
 but I have seen his work
 and know to my soul
 he is real
 and a force at work in our world.
He must be pleased that the intellectual elites
 deny his existence,
 offering him the cover of anonymity within which to destroy.

One of the tactics I know of satan is that
 the moments in our lives
 that are of spiritual significance
 draw his fire.
As you prepare and begin your Lenten discipline,
 satan recognizes
 that if unabated
 you will grow closer to God
 and a step further beyond his reach.
So he selects you
 and acts now
 to try to prevent it.

Moments in our lives of spiritual significance
are times when he targets us.

Let me tell you sometime my own story of that target on my back
from the moment I was approved for postulancy by the Standing
Committee.

And my story is not the only one and not unusual. I was not
warned and did not recognized what was happening when our
secular and economic lives were reduced to almost nothing while I
studied for the diaconate.

You undoubtedly have your own stories to tell,
and I would like to hear them,
about the spiritual attack
just before or during a time of spiritual significance in your
life.

Our priests will tell you
that the time when they are the most consumed in pastoral
calls
is just before the Great Christian Holidays,
times when we step closer to God
at Christmas and Easter.

You see my dear friends in Christ
We live in a time of battle
A battle that is waged every day
And particularly now
A battle for our souls
A battle between the devil and God
A battle over whether we are God's children
Or fodder for the devil's meal

It is a battle that we often cannot discern
We cannot see it clearly
We are often deaf to its shrieks, howls, screams and moans
We are deceived by the evil one and cannot sense it's bitter
taste

But make no mistake
we are the prize to be won or lost;
In the battle between good and evil.

So let us examine the temptations of Christ in the Wilderness
For some understanding of the battle
For how we may survive.

We are forewarned to be on watch for the devil at times of spiritual
significance in our lives. Point made.

Let's look at how satan wages the battle.

The attack is subtle
But the result is profound
He knows the physical vulnerability of Our Lord at the end of his
food and drink fast.
And so that is the point of the attack
The place we are most vulnerable.

We must each of us beware of our individual vulnerability.
Satan's weapon of choice
For the battle for Jesus
is scripture.

In fact, an illusion to the 91st psalm
Which he will use later
He says Use your power,
change this stone into bread

In fact, God does not want you to starve
 To become unable to carry out His mission
 He would want you to use your powers to save yourself so
 you may save mankind.

You can do it
 Change this stone into bread
 That you may live and serve God

Satan offers a corrupt means to achieve God's end.
 Subtle.
 Cunning
 Deceptive

It worked in the garden of Eden, Adam and Eve
 Condemning mankind to original sin
 But Jesus will not be fooled
 For us the means is every bit as important as the ends.

Jesus sees the trap, steps over it and cites Deuteronomy
 The second telling of Moses
 The entire passage is this; Moses lecturing the children of
 Israel:
 And He humbled thee and suffered thee to hunger
 And fed thee with manna, . . .
 That He might make thee know
 that man doth not live by bread only
 but by every word that proceedeth
 out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live.

Point taken:
 Those who have chosen Lenten disciplines involving food
 And suffer hunger
 Are learning that we do not live by food alone
 But by every word of God.

Satan is defeated.

But satan is undaunted.

Next he tries to derail, deflect the power of the crucifixion and resurrection;

From a high place on the temple in Jerusalem
 Satan suggests a demonstration of God's plan
 Jump and the angels will save you
 Everyone will see the miracle and know that you are the Son
 of God, the Messiah,
 You will instantly achieve God's plan
 A better
 Faster
 and far less painful means to His goal
 He will love you for it.
 You will be a hero

It's classic Satan

Trust me
 I am one of you
 Helping you and helping God
 To achieve what God wants
 The devil recites the 11th and 12th verse of the 91st Psalm.
 He shall send his angels, they shall bear thee up
 That thou doest not dash thy foot against a stone
 Leap, while all are looking
 Make the demonstration
 Show them who you are.

Jesus goes to Deuteronomy again;

It is written: Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.
 Do not set out a test of God.
 He does not work that way.
 There are no shortcuts fashioned by man to achieve the will of God
 Sometimes it is the journey He puts before us
 That is what makes us who God wills us to be
 Sometimes that journey is hard
 Point taken.

Satan tries one last time.
He offers Jesus the world.
Which the devil can deliver
 Certainly today, we would have to say our world
 Is, by and large
 in the hands of the devil.
Satan Offers Him that which God seeks
 That Jesus is King
 Jesus is the saviour
He need only bow down and worship the devil
 And all will be achieved

Another deception
 Satan again professes to be an ally
 In disguise he seems innocuous
 He suggests a way
 That seems to be aligned with the good,
 With God
 A better, faster and easier way
 To achieve what God wants

Another corruption of the means by which God has chosen to
achieve His ends.

Jesus goes back to Deuteronomy:
 Thou shalt worship the Lord, thy God
 And Him only shalt thou serve

The epic battle was joined
The combatants engaged
Weapon drawn
Forces unleashed
But the forces of Good will always overcome the forces of evil.
Last point taken.

Jesus warns:
Satan get thee hence
And the battle is won.
For today.

Satan was again defeated.
But would be back
To suffer his great defeat at Calvary
At the cross
Where Jesus fulfilled the Mission
Saved mankind
And defeated evil

Lesson for us?
Satan has no more power than
We are willing to give him.

With God's help
We will prevail
With God's help
We will see eternal life
Where there is no Satan
Where there is no evil
We need only meet the temptation
That will inexorably be put in our path

Get thee hence Satan

