

Homily for Lent 1
March 9-10, 2019

Look Out!

The local sheriff was looking for a deputy, and one of the applicants - who was not known to be the brightest academically, was called in for an interview. "Okay," began the sheriff, "What is 1 and 1?" "Eleven," came the reply. The sheriff thought to himself, "That's not what I meant, but he's right."

Then the sheriff asked, "What two days of the week start with the letter 'T'?" "Today & tomorrow." Replied the applicant. The sheriff was again surprised over the answer, one that he had never thought of himself.

"Now, listen carefully, who killed Abraham Lincoln?" asked the sheriff. The job seeker seemed a little surprised, then thought really hard for a minute and finally admitted, "I don't know." The sheriff replied, "Well, why don't you go home and work on that one for a while?" The applicant left and wandered over to his pals who were waiting to hear the results of the interview. He greeted them with a cheery smile, "The job is mine! The interview went great! First day on the job and I'm already working on a murder case!"

In our Gospel reading for today it is Jesus' first day on the job. Immediately he is confronted with three major temptations. These are the most basic temptations in life, and they form the foundation for all other temptations.

Reading about Jesus' first day on the job is the annual Gospel on this first Sunday in Lent. Every year as we enter into the Lenten Season the Church declares:

Look out! Danger ahead. Be aware of concupiscence.

It is the primary strategy the devil utilizes to get us to displace and even forget God, thus concluding that we are at the centre of everything and the masters of our own destiny.

So what is concupiscence? It comes from a Latin root that means "eager desire". It is most clearly defined by St. John in his first Epistle:

For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world.

The Church teaches that concupiscence is disordered desire causing us to want what is harmful, referred to as the lust of the eyes. It stimulates us to satisfy our physical appetites in ways contrary to God's will, what is called the lust of the flesh. It leads us to believing that we are ultimately the masters of our own destiny, the pride of life.

Think about concupiscence in relation to the epidemic of pornography:

- Lust of the eyes is drawn into illicit images and movies.
- Lust of the flesh results in disordered forms of self-gratification.

- Pride of life occurs as the people on the screens are objectified so that it results in real life scenarios where women are dominated by men through the abuse of power.

Remember how the serpent used this three- fold strategy in Genesis 3?

“So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food (**lust of the flesh**) and that it was a delight to the eyes (**lust of the eyes**), and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise (**the pride of life**), she ate it and her husband ate it.

And we know how that meal ended. They did not live happily ever after and had more than just indigestion. The strategy of the devil was successful.

Now think of all of this in relation to the Gospel for today. It again shows the devil’s age old strategy of concupiscence. The devil attempts to get Jesus to turn the stones into bread and thus satisfy the lust of the flesh. Jesus answers by quoting the Book of Deuteronomy.

One does not live by bread alone

Next, he shows him all the kingdoms of the world, the lust of the eyes, and promises Jesus authority over them. The only condition,

If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.

Jesus is having none of it. Again, he counters the devil by quoting another passage from Deuteronomy.

*Worship the Lord your God,
and serve only him.’*

Now the devil, who is a persistent pest, decides to throw Jesus a curve ball. He quotes scripture for the first time, a portion of today’s appointed Psalm 91.

*“If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here,¹⁰ for it is written,
‘He will command his angels concerning you,
to protect you,’
¹¹and
‘On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’*

Again, Jesus say “unt-ah” I am not playing your game Satan. Nor am I placing myself at the centre of the Temple by falling down from its highest point. – what a spectacle that would be. The pride of life writ large. For a third time Jesus quotes Deuteronomy.

‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’

St. John, who so clearly helps us to understand the threefold strategy used by the devil to have us succumb to him, is also the apostle he tells us in 1 John 3.8:

The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.

Jesus is the only one with the authority to help us overcome the influence of the devil's concupiscent strategy.

Each one of us is tempted by this threefold concupiscence and need to take to heart the church's warning: “

“Look out, concupiscence ahead”.

This is why during Lent the Church invites us to fast so as to mortify the flesh's desire to be constantly satisfied. Similarly, the offering of alms counters the lust of the eyes. Rather than thinking... “I want that”, alms giving inspires us to use our eyes – to look around to see how we can help others. And finally, prayer brings us to the place a deepening humility where rather than placing ourselves at the middle we want to place God there and so counter the pride of life.

The challenge to overcome concupiscence is vividly captured by JRR Tolkien in the *Lord of the Rings*. The Ring is enticing to the eyes”; for it is “My Precious”. It feeds the lust of the flesh for the one who wears it has power over his body, allowing him to disappear. And most of all it will allow for Sauron, Middle Earth's evil lord to have absolute control over that world if he attains the Ring. “For it is the One Ring to Rule them all”. This is the Pride of Life.

Tolkien vividly portrays for us through the three books how difficult it is to overcome concupiscence and how its power can come to dominate and destroy those held in its grasp, as we see with the tragic character, Gollum.

Tolkien in hundreds of thousands of words elaborates on what St Luke says in 289 words. If we are going to be on the job, it's not to figure out who murdered the 16th President of the United States – that was John Wilkes Booth. No our job is to join with Jesus as we battle the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life.

Therefore, look out for concupiscence. For the disciple of Jesus this is a lifelong job.