

First Sunday in Lent
Year A

Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7

Psalm 32

Romans 5:12-19

Matthew 4:1-11

Rarely are any of us confronted with the temptations Jesus faced in the gospel reading today. I doubt any of us have gone without food or water for forty days, nor would we even consider trying to make rocks turn into food. We might hold the same attitude towards the other temptations, although there have been people in the world in all generations who have wanted to rule the entire world. So, what is Matthew trying to convey to us in this passage?

The temptation which Eve faced in the reading from Genesis might be a little closer to us. As I view the world today, I think there are many who would like to have the knowledge of good and evil on a par with God. In fact, there might be some who would like to equate themselves with God.

Evil is hard to understand so people have been putting labels on it from the beginning of time. We create images of evil, we give evil names, we tell stories about evil, all so we might be able to understand a power that is beyond our comprehension. Thus, in Genesis, evil is called “the serpent.” In the gospel, it is called “the tempter.” In other places, we see the name Beelzebub or the Devil. In popular culture, the list goes on and on of names and images given to explain evil. Why do we do this?

Temptation is a manifestation of desire. We feel that the grass is greener on the other side of the fence, so to speak, as we look at what others have. Another name for this is covetousness. We want what we do not have.

In the Garden of Eden, Eve was tempted by the desire to have the knowledge of good and evil, to become like God. In the wilderness, Jesus was tempted with food, power, and glory. Daily, we are tempted by things we see around us. Advertising of all types plays on that desire. The question is – how do we respond to that temptation?

Eve succumbed to it and ate the fruit. Jesus resisted the temptation, quoting scripture, but most importantly, by reminding us that nothing is more important than God. If we focus on God, putting all our trust and faith in God, everything else is nothing.

Each day, we are called upon to make decisions. We can take the easy route and agree to whatever comes our way, everything that looks good, sounds wonderful, or appeals to our vanity, or we can step back and take the time to discern what God would have us to do.

Does evil exist? Of course it does. We see examples of it daily all around us. Are we tempted to do that which might not be in our best interest? Of course we are. But, we have a resource to draw upon to help us overcome the evil that surrounds us and help us make the best decisions.

That resource is God's Holy Spirit. Through our prayers and through our study of God's Word, we can tap into that resource at any time and in any situation. Scripture reminds us that Jesus said He would be with us until the end of the age and that we would not be tempted above that which we can handle. By trusting in God, we can overcome all that attacks us and, like Jesus, we can successfully resist the temptations that come our way.