

Saint Thomas' Church  
Lent I  
March 1, 2020  
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 21<sup>st</sup>, 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 81<sup>st</sup> 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 91<sup>st</sup> 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 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> verse of the 91<sup>st</sup> 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