

Sunday March 6, 2022
First Sunday of Lent
Parishioner Reflection
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The readings this week give us much to reflect upon. Our Lenten journey is just beginning and it's time we take a step back and examine our relationship to Christ. In the Old Testament Moses speaks to the Israelites about gratitude for all Yahweh has given them. How can we rekindle the faith within us and be grateful for the gifts God has given us? In the second reading St. Paul speaks to the Romans about faith. This gift of faith is for all humankind. God knows no distinction and is generous to all who call upon him. In the gospel Luke presents us with the testing in the desert. It is Jesus versus Satan in a heavyweight match for the ages. Satan believes he can entice Jesus to give in to the lure of power and privilege. Jesus doesn't take the bait but throws a left hook and lets it be known he has come to serve God and those who are without hope.

The first reading comes from the Book of Deuteronomy. This book in general is concerned with moral issues. It is the last book in the Jewish Torah and in many ways it repeats the laws given by God to the Israelites. Moses reminds God that the Israelites can be stubborn and they often repeat past sins. Together they present the laws again for the chosen people to help them understand their relationship with God. It's a very important book for the Jewish people because it stresses their relationship with this one true God.

In the first reading today Moses reminds the people they shall take the first fruits of their harvest from the land God had given them to the priest. Here they declare that Yahweh is there God and this is the land he has given to our ancestors. After the priest takes the basket they declare that their father was a wandering Aramaean and went to Egypt. Here the small group of men stayed and became a great and numerous nation. They were ill-treated and enslaved by the Egyptians. They called upon Yahweh and he saw their oppression and misery. Yahweh brought them out of Egypt with a mighty hand and with power and great signs. He brought us to this country, a land fertile with milk and honey. The Israelite then bows down before the Lord your God. He rejoices at what God has given to him and his family.

Gratitude is a theme very much present in the first reading. Yahweh is a patient God, slow to anger and abounding in love. God answers our prayers when we call out to him just as he did for the Israelites thousands of years ago. Their faith has saved them. There is a message here for us today. We have an opportunity during these next forty days to reflect upon the gifts God has given us. How can we use them to bring light to others? How can we be of service to God and others rather than serve our own interests?

In the second reading St. Paul writes a reflective letter to the Christian community in Roman. His letter explains what scripture says about faith. He speaks about faith being present in the heart and upon one's lips. A faith that declares Jesus is Lord and was raised from the dead. This faith will bring one salvation. No one who believes in Christ will be put to shame. This faith is for all peoples. There is no distinction based on one's ethnicity, gender, social status, or education. Power and privilege are irrelevant when it comes to the gift of faith. St. Paul concludes with the powerful statement, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

The gospel this week comes from Luke chapter four verses one to thirteen. Jesus is filled with the Holy Spirit after just being baptized in the River Jordan. Before he sets out on his public ministry Jesus goes into the desert led by the Spirit. He eats nothing for forty days. During this time he is tempted by the devil but holds firm to his faith and rejects Satan's temptations.

Satan tries to entice Jesus to abuse his power and privilege three times but Jesus resists holding fast to his Jewish teachings. The devil believes if he can convince Jesus to abuse his power and position it will prove that it was Satan who is the more powerful. Power is not something Jesus strives for above all else. For Jesus his life is about service. He came into this world to serve God, the poor, the outcasts, the imprisoned and those without hope.

How much power and privilege do we have in our modern world? Depending on your gender, age, race, education and level of income you may have a great deal of power and privilege in our world. Do you ever feel tempted to use your position and the power that goes with it to your advantage? If we look around our world we can see many examples of the abuse of power and privilege.

The present war in the Ukraine is a prime example. The Russian President is an autocratic leader abusing his power and aggressively attacking his neighbor. Rather than using peaceful diplomacy to communicate his concerns he resorts to military force to destroy, subjugate an independent and democratic Ukraine.

Some politicians have been caught abusing their positions by being hypocritical during the pandemic. They announce strict mandates about the number of people in social gatherings but they themselves ignore them and gather in large groups for parties and celebrations. A number of powerful males in positions of authority whether in the business world, entertainment and even police forces have used their positions to sexually abuse female staff. In fact sexual abuse is a long standing problem within the Catholic Church by priests who have abused their positions of power over children in their care. The leaders of the Catholic Church have much work to do to explain how such serious transgressions were allowed to occur, prosecute individuals complicit in these matters, put in place legal safeguards so this form of abuse never happens again and restore trust among the Catholic laity. Residential Schools are another example of the abuse of

power and privilege. These schools it has come to light came to be places of emotional, physical and sexual abuse throughout their history in Canada. The Christian orders and the Catholic Church have apologized for their actions, begun to compensate victims, and explain their role in this dark chapter in our country's history. Power and privilege have indeed been abused in the past.

In Lent we have the opportunity to realize the privilege and power we enjoy in our lives. How are we using it? Do we use it for the betterment of our community? Are we abusing it to gain more of an advantage over others? How can we put God first in our daily lives? Let us take this opportunity to examine our lives closely and use the gifts we've been given, so we can serve God and others in our community and in our greater world.