



## First Sunday of Lent February 22, 2015 B

- **Tempted by the Good**
- **The Work of the Devil**
- **Eleven Lessons from Noah's Ark**

### **Tempted by the Good**

In his book on the Sundays and *Holy Days of the Church Year*, Fr. Flor McCarthy writes:

*Insects and flies are lured by the scent of the sweet. Many times they discover that following a sweet scent can lead to a life of imprisonment or worse. Unable to resist the lure of the scent, they crawl far into a flower only to get so steeped in pollen that they can't get out.*

*You might think this could never happen with us humans. We are too smart to fall for that. The sad fact is that we do allow it to happen. Like the bees we are lured by the scent of the sweet.*

*The popular meaning of temptation is enticing a person to do wrong. When we think of temptations, we immediately think of bad things. However, it is not only evil which can lead us astray. Good can do so just as effectively. In fact, all temptation comes under the guise of good. And the strength of a temptation is in proportion to the attractiveness of the goal.*

*It is not only when the path is hard and strewn with obstacles that we fail to reach the goal, but also when it is easy and littered with attractions. In the latter case we are tempted to dally along the way. We allow ourselves to get side-tracked, so that before we know it, we've forgotten our goal and wasted our strength. Earthly food dulls the appetite for heavenly food. There are no shortage of examples of this in the Gospels.*

*On one occasion Jesus invited a rich young man to become his disciple, but he refused. It wasn't evil which caused him to refuse—he had done no evil. It was something which is good in itself—wealth.*

*When Jesus went to the house of Martha and Mary, Martha was too busy to listen to him. It wasn't something bad which kept her from listening to him. It was something good, even praise-worthy—the details of hospitality.*

*Jesus told a story about guests who refused an invitation to a banquet. In refusing they were not acting from bad motives, but from perfectly good ones. One man wanted to inspect a piece of land he had bought.*

*Another wanted to try out some oxen he had bought. And a third was newly married. However, though their reasons for staying away were perfectly good, the effect was the same as if they had been perfectly vile—they allowed the banquet to pass them by.*

*In his parable of the sower, Jesus said that some of the seeds were choked by thorns. What did these 'thorns' consist of? 'The worries and cares of this world and the lure of riches.' Again, things not evil in themselves.*

*What are we to deduce from all of this? That we may have as much to fear from the good as from the bad. After all, when we see something which is manifestly evil, we are more likely to be repelled than attracted by it. But when we see something which is manifestly good, we are likely to be attracted by it. Hence, it poses more danger. 'Set a bird's wings with gold and it will never fly' (Rabindranath Tagore).*

*The things that tempt us to abandon our goal are not always bad. More often than not, they are good, and that is what makes it so hard to resist them. The most painful choices are often between the good and the best.*

*The devil doesn't appear as a repulsive character. He appears as an attractive, ingratiating, charming character, even a friend. He appears to have your best interest at heart—as when he offered Jesus bread and all the kingdoms of the world. We need wisdom and strength to be able to resist temptations, especially those that come under the guise of good.*

[Fr. Flor McCarthy, *Holy Days of the Church Year*.  
Permission granted by Dominican Publications,  
[www.dominicanpublications.com](http://www.dominicanpublications.com).]

### **The Devil**

These days we are seeing the face of evil in the work of the terrorist group ISIS. Evil has many faces. While all of us will agree that evil exists in many forms in our world, not all of us may agree that there exists a *personal* evil force that Christians call the devil or Satan. In one of his General Audiences in 1973, Blessed Paul VI had this to say about the existence of the devil:

*One of our greatest needs is our defense from the evil which is called the Devil.... We know that this dark and disturbing spirit really exists, and that he still acts with*

*treacherous cunning; he is the secret enemy that sows errors and misfortunes in human history.... The question of the devil and the influence that he can exert on individual persons, as well as on communities and whole societies, is a very important chapter of Catholic doctrine.*

### **The Work of the Devil**

In general, we can say that the work of the devil is to destroy! destroy! and destroy!—to destroy our relationship with God; to destroy relationships among nations, among ethnic groups, among churches and among religions; to destroy the unity within the church, in parishes, marriages and families; and finally, to destroy our sense of self-worth. If the work of the Holy Spirit is to build up and create unity, the work of Satan and his legions of devils is to do the very opposite.

### **Where Does Satan Operate?**

Where is Satan's field of activity? Primarily in individuals and groups that seek to promote faith in God and in Jesus; that uphold justice, peace, truth and goodness. If we believe this, then we can be sure that Satan sends his top lieutenants to places like the Vatican, Chancery offices, retreat houses, parishes, the White House, the State Department, the Pentagon, the Supreme High Court and all the other courts. Undoubtedly, Satan is very active in CEOs' offices where decisions on the economy and environment are made.

Genesis 3:1 tells us that Satan, a fallen angel (see Revelations 12), is the "most cunning of creatures." This means that he is a very smart cookie indeed, smarter than any Harvard graduate, or Pope John Paul, George Bush or even Osama bin Laden. He knows well their weaknesses and strengths, and exploits these for his own evil ends, just as he is aware of our own weaknesses and strengths which he feeds on to carry out his evil plans on us. He uses our tendencies to be proud, jealous, angry, unforgiving, greedy, promiscuous, controlling, etc., to hurt us, to tear down and destroy our relationships, communities and environment. He seeks to get us to misuse, overuse or underuse our strengths. For example, I have some talent in the area of writing which God has given me to communicate his truth and to inspire. Conversely, it is Satan's desire that I use this gift to spread falsehoods and half-truths. He would very well want me to overuse this gift and neglect my other duties—or ignore this gift by convincing me that it is of no use to anyone.

### **Satan - A Liar**

In John 8:44, Jesus says of the devil: *"Lying speech is his native tongue; he is a liar and the father of lies."*

The devil deceived Adam and Eve in the Garden. He tried to deceive Jesus in the desert. We can assume he wants to manipulate us into believing that God does not love us, especially during the tough times. "How could a loving God allow you or your loved ones to suffer this much? See, he really doesn't care about you," Satan whispers to us when we are vulnerable, depressed and discouraged.

### **Stealer of the Word of God**

In Matthew 13:19, Jesus speaks of the devil as "stealing the word" of God that had been sown in our hearts. "Stealing the word"—an interesting phrase. How often have we heard a word that touches our heart and want to act on it, but hours or days later, that inspiring word fades away and we return to our old ways?

### **Satan Can Enter Our Hearts**

In John 13:27, we read how Satan "entered the heart" of Judas, moving him to betray Jesus and hand him over to sinful men. How awfully sad! We can be sure that Satan wants to also enter our hearts and move us to do all kinds of things that are contrary to the Word of God. For sure he wants to harden our hearts against those who have hurt us, making us believe that they are little monsters and evil people undeserving of our forgiveness. He is intent on exploiting any tendency we have to be angry, and moving us to use our anger in a very destructive way.

As I already said, Satan is a very smart cookie and we need not have doubts about his presence and activity in our world. Yet we don't need to give him too much focus. Our eyes should be fixed on Jesus without us losing sight of the fact that Satan is our archenemy. C.S. Lewis once said that Satan is equally happy when we exaggerate or minimize his presence in the world.

### **Eleven Lessons from Noah's Ark**

Today's first reading spoke about the Great Flood which Noah and his family survived because he was smart enough to prepare for it. A few years ago, a couple I was preparing for marriage emailed me the following piece on Noah's Ark. It is pretty cute and makes some good points.

- One:** Don't miss the boat.
- Two:** Remember that we are all in the same boat.
- Three:** Plan ahead. It wasn't raining when Noah built the Ark.
- Four:** Stay fit. When you're 600 years old, someone may ask you to do something really big.
- Five:** Don't listen to critics; just get on with the job that needs to be done.
- Six:** Build your future on high ground.
- Seven:** For safety's sake, travel in pairs.
- Eight:** Speed isn't always an advantage. The snails were on board with the cheetahs.
- Nine:** When you're stressed, float a while.
- Ten:** Remember, the Ark was built by amateurs; the Titanic by professionals.
- Eleven:** No matter the storm, when you are with God, there's always a rainbow waiting.

### **A Haitian Parable**

Today's Gospel features Jesus and his battle with Satan.

A Haitian parable is told of a man who wanted to sell his house for \$2,000. Another man wanted very badly to buy it; but because he was poor, he couldn't afford the full price. After much bargaining, the owner agreed to sell the house for half the original price with just one stipulation: he'd retain ownership of one small nail protruding over the door. After several years, the original owner wanted the house back; but the new owner was unwilling to sell. So the first owner hung the carcass of a dead dog from the nail he still owned. Soon the house became unlivable and the family was forced to sell the house to the owner of the nail.

The point of the parable is simple. If we leave the devil one small area of our life, he'll return to hang his rotting garbage on it, making it unfit for Christ to live in our lives.

Have a blessed week,

