

A Bible Bullet (aimed at the heart)

First Sunday of Lent, Cycle C
Deut. 26:4-10; Romans 10:8-13; Luke 4:1-13

At scripture class last week, my group pondered a Lenten reflection by a Fr. Michael Himes. He began his story of the Temptation of Jesus by thinking back on the first temptation of humans in the Garden of Eden. Father suggested that the temptation of our first parents was not to desire to be like God Himself, but to fail to see that they already were richly blessed to be made in his image and likeness. They failed to appreciate the blessedness and beauty of their own creation and their relationship with God that was a result of His creative love for them. Are we guilty of human shortsightedness that leads us to be ungrateful?

As Lent begins we frequently find ourselves called to reflect on the experience of Jesus in the wilderness. Many of us are inclined to imagine the bareness of our own Death Valley or Mojave Desert. This, however, would not describe the wilderness Jesus experienced. Imagine light limestone colored hills which hide springs of water that seem to appear from nowhere. The trees and grasses dead in the height of summer yields to a lush green in the rainy season. The quietness of it allows the spirit within a pilgrim to reach spiritual realms beyond those of the turmoil and hustle of everyday life. It is a place that offers up the visitor to a refreshed relationship with one's Creator. Think of that place on earth that refreshes your soul. What experiences there now cause you to recall it as a place or moment of restoration?

For Jesus, this place of restoration gave him the quiet to consider the difference between the role he would play and the mission he would fulfill. Perhaps this is some of what perplexed Adam and Eve. They did not consider their roles as creations of the Creator. Have you considered the difference in your life? Our role is the part that we play, our function on this earth. Our mission is that calling that was given to us, the task that has been assigned to us by a Greater Authority. The challenge that we face is bringing these two together.

Whatever we claim as our vocation, whether it is religious, married, or single, becomes our challenge. None of these, simply by our participation, fulfills our mission automatically. Each of these must be seen, lived, endured, defined, and choreographed within parameters that are consistent with our mission.

This is the task that Jesus took upon himself as he entered the wilderness. He had come to the understanding that his heavenly Father had called him to the

mission of Messiah. Now, what role would he play within this? He felt that remaining a carpenter in Nazareth would be an honorable occupation, but would it allow him to fulfill his mission? Suppose he became that great provider of food for the people. Certainly there was nothing wrong with that! But would it adequately reveal his Father to the world? Perhaps he could present himself as a powerful commander thereby dwarfing all earthly powers around him. So many of them were tyrants anyway. Wouldn't this be contributing to the common good? He could also wow the masses with magical wonders so they would know he is the Son of God. How could winning over the people be wrong?

Spending time alone with his Father helped Jesus define his mission: He must reveal to the world the Father's love. And that, Jesus decided, could only be done through the role of a suffering servant who takes on human illnesses and carries their diseases for them right to a cross.

What role are you playing and why are you playing it? Is it consistent with your mission? The good news is that we have this time of Lent to find out, to pray about it, to stop kidding ourselves, and to be intimate with our Father. The bad news is that it just might hurt. There may be a cross in it for us too. Are we grateful enough to take a chance?