

The First Sunday in Lent

Lectionary B, Mark 1:9-15

Trinity Church, February 18, 2018

We are now in the season of Lent. It is a time when we remember Jesus' retreat in the wilderness to reflect on his life, and a time when he was tempted to become someone he was not meant to be. He survived the experience rejecting all the temptations of Satan. On other occasions he also went on retreat to be with his heavenly Father. While we often think of Jesus' ministry as being active with preaching, teaching,

healing, and surviving danger from his adversaries, he was also a mystic. He spent time with his Father, praying and listening, developing a loving and faithful relationship with the Source of his own identity. And his relationship with the Father has become the model for what our relationship is meant to be with God.

During this Lenten season it is customary for us to be reflective about our lives as Jesus was about his life, and introspective about our relationship with God. We may practice fasting of some sort, or we may take on some good work to

give the season a positive meaning.

Penance is also a practice of the season; that is, a time to look at what we might do to live our lives in a more positive way by giving up habits or attitudes that are hurtful to ourselves or others.

Years ago in what we call “high churches” (that is, in churches that use smells and bells with glorious rituals for their liturgies), I used to find cards on the tract rack at the back of the church that would have lists of sins that people are known to commit. I don’t remember seeing murder as one of them, but a list of common

sins we are likely to commit. If you chose to make a private confession to the priest, all you needed to do was to pick up one of these cards and check off all the things you had done wrong since your last confession. A friend of mine, who later became a priest, did this. Since he couldn't think of enough sins that he had actually committed, he checked off some of the other offenses to add to his list so that he would have enough material to confess. Much to his horror, the priest hearing his confession reprimanded him severely for being so naughty. My

friend was then furious with the priest. But I think my friend may have failed to tell the priest that he wasn't telling the truth in the confessional.

Well, I don't know if you have ever thought of doing such a thing. I certainly haven't. I can make up a sufficient list without referring to a check list. But an alternative method may be helpful to you.

I have a small prayer book that I have created (like this) that has all sorts of prayers, intercessions for people I know and love, and a list of those things

that I remember on a daily basis to stay focused and out of trouble. I'll mention just a few of them to give you examples.

“Don't add fuel to fires.” This is a reminder to me that when there is a problem, particularly when people are speaking ill of someone, that I don't add more information to inflame the situation. The criticisms being made may be very true; but there is a difference between discerning a problem and beating the culprit to death. Being part of a “gang-up” against someone is easy to do, and facilitates a touch of revenge. So I

daily remind myself not to add fuel to fires in order to lessen the pain inflicted on the accused.

“Teasing isn’t always funny” is another one. It’s so easy to tease someone that includes a barb that can hurt. We sometimes do that to lessen the severity of the criticism, but we still want to make our point. Sometimes even playful teasing when we do not intend to hurt can hurt someone’s feelings. I’ve had to apologize when I did that, not intending to hurt, but managed to do so because I wasn’t being thoughtful.

A good practice, I think, is to put on paper the potholes you are likely to fall into. You can also put in writing positive statements to inspire you to live the way you wish to live. One of mine is, “Live in thanksgiving...by grace...in an eternal dimension.” Our reminders are meant to keep us positive, not to tear us down with guilt.

I have my little loose leaf prayer book begun when I was a teenager. The binders have changed, but this prayer book is my greatest treasure, with the names of people I have prayed for sixty years ago. I can't remember

all of them in prayer each day, of course, and many are dead. But on Good Friday I remember not only those in the present, but those I have known and loved in the past. I only tell you this to encourage you to create your own little prayer book that will remain dear to you for the rest of your life.

As you take on an introspective perspective this Lent, think of something that will pull your life together, serve the good of others through prayer, and bind you closer to the Source of your life. Your prayer time will become a love fest, bringing you a deeper

sense of what love can mean, and  
fill you with joy. Have a happy  
Lent.