Homily 2/26/23 Lent 1 – Roger Ludin

Wow! What a selection in these lessons: Original Sin, confession, redemption & forgiveness, the temptation of Christ! Where to begin? Well, let’s start with Matthew and the Temptation of Christ.

This selection comes right after Jesus’ baptism, where the skies opened up and God declared “Thou are my Son, the Beloved.” This is the basis of Satan’s temptation – prove you are the Son of God. At that time the term ‘Son of God’ had several meanings. The Davidian kings were all called Sons of God. The Roman Caesars were called ‘Son of God’. Satan was daring Jesus to prove it with magic.

After his baptism, Jesus went into the wilderness for 40 days and 40 nights to fast and pray. Going into the wilderness is a common theme throughout the Bible, as well as 40-somethings: Elijah’s sojourn, Noah’s voyage, Moses up on Mt Sinai inscribing the tablets, the Israelites wandering the desert for 40 years, the 40 days of Lent. Wandering in the wilderness is all symbolic of having a time of preparation awaiting what God has in store for you. Elijah got his commission at the end of his ordeal, Noah got the compact, Moses got the ten commandments, and the Israelites got the Promised Land. Jesus’s time was preparing him for his ministry.

Near the end of his fasting, Satin appeared and challenged Jesus, “If you are the Son of God change this rock into bread so you can eat. Jesus, who was hungry. replied with a verse from Deuteronomy, “Man does not live by bread alone but every word that comes from the mouth of God.” He is accepting his humanity and dependence on God – not equality. However, later, with five loves and two fishes he fed five thousand. He is using his “powers” to help others, not himself. He is starving in the wilderness, but does not succumb to temptation.

So, the Devil transports them to the highest tower of the temple in Jerusalem. Note: this is 2 millennia before Star Trek and “Beam me up, Scotty.”. This time Satan evoked the scriptures: Psalm 91 verses 11 and 12. “For he shall give his angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways. They shall bear you in their hands lest you dash your foot against a stone.” (This was our sequence hymn.) Satan is saying “Jump” and prove yourself! Once again Jesus retreats to Deuteronomy. “Do not put your Lord, your God to the test.” This phrase comes from Moses rebuking the Israelites for complaining in the desert after God gave the manna to survive. This is also a prelude to the crucifixion when the crowds taunted Jesus with “If you are the son of God come down from the cross.”

Then they teleport to the highest mountain for the last temptation. It is pretty presumptuous of Satan to say that all they surveyed was his to give away. Again, Jesus rebukes the devil with “away with you Satan” and quoted Deuteronomy “Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.”

The devil finally left and then the angels came and waited on Jesus, feeding him and taking care of him as a parent would a child who just recovered from a serious illness. Jesus never succumbed to temptation. He had decided to use his power as the Son of God to be a servant to his fellow humans.

Paul in his letter to the Romans is basically saying that sin came into the world through one man (he didn’t recognize women) so we are all sinners, but through Christ’s sacrifice we can be saved and forgiven. God always wants us to be open, bring ourselves to accountability and be assured that He is always looking out for humanity.

While Paul’s message is hidden and hard to find, it is very overt in the psalm. While Lent is supposed to be a time of sadness and introspection, this psalm begins and ends with happiness. Happy are they whose transgressions are forgiven, and whose sin is put away! Happy are they to whom the Lord imputes no guilt, and in whose Spirit there is no guile! And later the meat of the psalm: Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and did not conceal my guilt. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.” Then you forgave me the guilt of my sin. This is what Paul meant by being open. Confess your sins and be forgiven.

The psalm ends on a high note: “Great are the tribulations of the wicked; but mercy embraces those who trust in the Lord. Be glad, you righteous, and rejoice in the Lord; shout for joy, all who are true of heart.” This is our escape clause. Being righteous is not being sinless, but of being forgiven and open to God. Trust God rather than oneself. Silence brings suffering, but being open and confession brings joy and forgiveness. A truly uplifting message.

Finally. we come to original sin in Genesis. I personally have a problem with the idea that two people populated the whole world. Adam and Eve had three sons that we know of, but would have to had many more children to create a clan. If they had 20 children, half would probably not live to maturity. And the brothers and sisters would have to mate to continue the lines. Look what happened in the royal families of Europe who inbred a lot. After a few generations, many of them had mental problems. But that is away from the topic of original sin. God had given Adam and Eve the garden of Eden, with only one restriction – do not eat of the tree of life. However, the story turns into something like an Aesop fable with talking animals. The serpent (not the devil) converses with

Eve and convinces her that the fruit (not an apple) of the tree of life is good to eat and they will not die, but be like God and know good and evil. So, Eve eats and gets Adam to join her. Then poof they know they are naked and sewed fig leaves together for loin cloths – Sewing, another skill of creation? They hid when God came, but he called them out and asked if they had eaten of the tree. Adam passed the buck and said Eve made him do it. Then, Eve passed the buck and said the serpent made her. God was POed and made Adam work hard for the rest of his life, Eve have painful childbirths and the serpent lost his ability to speak and had to crawl on his belly.

What was missing here was that they did not own up and ask for forgiveness, so they made their life miserable. They blamed others when they were to blame. Would God have forgiven them if they were truly sorry and asked for forgiveness? That old adage “It is easier to do something and later ask for forgiveness, than to get permission beforehand.”

The underlying message running through the lessons today is a positive one. We are not expected to lead perfect lives, but be open and honest and God will be forgiving.