

First Sunday of Lent A/2008

It happens often that when we open our mail box, we find it full of advertising papers that propose various things to buy and enjoy. By listening to the news on radio or by watching the television, we have the same advertisements that follow us even into our living room. These advertisements are so tempting that most of the time people succumb to its charms. So, we find people who are heavily in debt as a consequence of buying everything that comes out of advertisements and new technology. It is such a situation of temptation, and sin as its consequence, that is described in the readings of this first Sunday of Lent.

The first reading focuses on the disobedience of Adam and Eve and its consequence. First of all, the text acknowledges that, although man was created from the clay of the earth, God insufflated in him his breath in order to make him a living creature and a partner. If so, where does the tragedy of the human condition come from? How to explain the imbalance we see in humans between the grandeur of being in the likeness of God and the misery of human sin?

To answer this question, the book of Genesis tells us a story of temptation at the origin of which sin and death came into the world. Like any story on the origin of human civilization, the point of the text is not to provide us with historic details about the first habitants of the earth, or to locate the site where they lived, or the kind of life they led.

At the heart of Genesis, there is a religious truth, namely that at the beginning of creation man and woman lived in happiness and joy, without shame toward one another. A real harmony reigned between them and nature, and all other God's creatures. Things turned bad when, instead of listening to God's order and being faithful, they did things in their own way by listening to other creatures rather than God. All that is expressed in a symbolic language under the image of a tree whose fruits they should not eat, and the serpent as the instigator who brings the disorder.

With all this, we understand that this story is not a simple report on what happened in the past, but a description and a mirror of the human condition. It describes what happens anytime we break from God and want to do things our own way. When we forget our state as creatures and want to be like God, when want to know both good and evil, we build our own destruction. When we do not respect God's plan and law, but instead set up our own moral law based on human passion and emotion, we eventually end up in confusion, taking bad as good and good as bad. When we refuse to depend on God and want to live free without him, we degrade ourselves. The result, in the end, is that we are ashamed of ourselves, because without God we can but be naked. It is God who clothes us, covers us and makes us beautiful as we are.

However, in spite of the disobedience, God did not lock us in our sins. He saved us in his son, Jesus Christ. That is what St Paul recalls in the second reading to the Romans. In fact, Paul draws a parallel between Jesus and Adam, but in an opposite way. What is at stake here is the idea of solidarity between Adam and Jesus, with the remaining of humanity. As Paul suggests, Adam was not an

individual *per se*. He was one of all mankind, and because he was so, his sin was the sin of all human beings, his condemnation the condemnation of the whole of humanity. In the same way, the solidarity of Jesus with human beings makes that through his obedience and faithfulness we are acquitted from death and drawn into life everlasting. “For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so, through the obedience of the one, the many will be made righteous”, St Paul says.

All that helps us understand the role Jesus plays in human history as the savior of the world, as well as the importance of his mission. That mission, however, was not free from trial. He had to go through suffering and death. But, in all that he was always faithful to his Father.

Today’s Gospel shows clearly how, unlike Adam and Eve, Jesus resisted the devil with the weapon of the word of God. The three temptations presented here are the summary of tests and trials Jesus went through in his life, but at the same time, they symbolize the temptations we face as Christians on a daily basis.

The unsatisfied appetite for food in all its forms, the desire to have our needs satisfied at any cost, the desire to have always more and more, the mirage of finding our material security outside God, the continual search for honor and the blindness that comes from power...; all that is continually before us. All these idols today have taken other forms and other colors, some of which are more subtle than we think. It belongs to each one to detect them, and to fight them with the strength of the word of God.

The truth, however, is that even when we know what these temptations are, we hardly overcome them. At the end, we run the risk of being discouraged and stop fighting spiritually.

It is here that the Lenten season takes all its importance. Lent is a moment and an opportunity to take up again and anew our fight; it is a time of surge against evil through prayer, fasting and almsgiving. In this fight, Jesus is given to us as an example. Jesus has become a human being in order to partake in the condition of our human weakness. That is why he was not spared from temptations, which is the lot of every human being.

But, like him, we can also triumph; he precedes us in the fight. With him, we can triumph. Jesus finds the strength to triumph in the word of his Father. Jesus invites us in this period to listen to the word of God, to make it the guideline of our lives. We cannot overcome our trials and temptations when we neglect the word of God. It is a true weapon for us. Let us ask God for the grace to cross the trials of life with Jesus. Let us allow God to find us where we are and guide us.

Genesis 2, 7-9. 3, 1-7; Romans 5, 12-19; Matthew 4, 1-11



Homily Date: February 10, 2008

© 2008 – Father Felicien Ilunga Mbala

Contact: www.mbala.org

Document Name: 20080210homily.pdf