

1st Sunday of Lent cycle C

Offerings are an essential part of religion. Even in pagan religions, religions devoted to gods which do not even exist, gods that did not reveal themselves but whom the people themselves created, even to these various offerings are made. For the Israelites, to whom the one true God did first reveal himself, offerings were called for, and therefore sacrifices were made: And so we heard in the reading from Deuteronomy, “I have now brought you the first fruits of the products of the soil which you, O Lord, have given me”—and they set these offering before the Lord. Offerings are also an important part of this faith of ours; at every Mass, we offer God the products of the soil, the bread and wine which he has given us; but in the Mass, those offerings are transformed and then offered back to us, for our spiritual benefit in Holy Communion—making it far more exalted, and a far greater offering than all others, because along with the bread and wine, we offer God our lives, our loves, our wills; and he in turn offers us his Son, to take away our sins. Offerings may differ in quality and efficacy, but they all have a few common threads. We cannot offer God what we don’t have; obviously, we can’t just think “bread and wine,” we actually have to produce it. Next, we should not offer God what is not ours; it means little to sacrifice that which belongs to our neighbor. This is one of the reasons why the widow’s mite takes on such great importance; even if all we have to offer is one dollar, or even just a few pennies, the support of the Church helps with the purchase of the bread and wine, and we are thus able to claim it as being ours. But the most important aspect of sacrifice, is that we ought to offer God our very best: the first fruits, not the leftovers; give him from our want, not our excess; and as satisfying though it is to be able to claim at least in part that bread and wine, to remember what we’re offering him first and foremost is our love, and our wills; and those are things which all of us can afford to sacrifice, and indeed, are called to sacrifice as Christians.

In the Gospel passage today, Jesus is called upon by Satan to make an offering; not to the Father, but to the devil himself. It underscores how the devil really works, because Jesus is said to be tempted, but we can tell throughout the story that he has no strong inclination to do what Satan bids him to do. And so we see the very essence of temptation lies in Satan calling upon us to perform some action or another; and like Jesus, we can resist strongly, or unlike Jesus, we can waver, and give some consideration to what the devil asks us to do. Just as the Israelites would take those first fruits of the land and lay them before God in his Holy Temple, so too does the devil call upon Jesus to take something which he, Jesus, has to offer, and lay it before Satan rather than before the Father. When he tempts Jesus to turn the stone into bread, he’s asking our Lord to lay before him his obedience: just follow his instructions. When he tempts Jesus with the kingdoms of the world, he’s asking Jesus to lay before him his worship; when he tempts our Lord with the parapet of the Temple, he’s asking Jesus to set down before Satan his trust. He asks our Lord to do all these things, and presents the temptations to him in such a way as to appeal to the human nature which Jesus took on at his incarnation, appeal to a human love for physical

satisfactions and power. But Jesus will offer the devil nothing; Satan leaves the encounter empty-handed.

If our Lord faced temptations, then we too must expect to encounter them in our daily lives. And although sometimes these temptations may take the form of extremely strong yet disordered desires, they are primarily a call from Satan to sacrifice to him, to make some sort of offering to him, to do his will rather than the will of God. The first temptation, as I mentioned, played upon the physical needs of our Lord: after fasting for so many days, of course Jesus was hungry, and how tempting it would have been to turn that stone into bread. But Jesus replies that “one does not live on bread alone.” Not that we never need physical nourishment, but that is not *all* that we need; we need spiritual nourishment most of all, and that cannot be obtained if we make our offering to Satan rather than to God. And so we should make it a habit to set before God at least some of our time, talents, and treasure: support Catholic organizations doing the works of mercy, both corporal and spiritual, on our behalf; give him some of our time, the one thing we possess that no one else does. Satan would have us set before *him* offerings of our selfishness, our own interests, our greed, our wealth. Set before him instead an empty basket, so that he knows that he will receive no sacrifice from us, not our first fruits, not our excess, not our leftovers, not a thing.

The next temptation: the devil said to Jesus, “I shall give you all this power and glory if you worship me.” We have the ability, and the opportunity, to give God our prayers and our adoration, and adoration is the preeminent act of worship which may rightfully be given to God, and to no one else. This is one of the beauties of Eucharistic adoration: it allows us to engage physically in what is essentially a spiritual act. As we set our eyes upon the Host, or even upon the Tabernacle knowing that Jesus is right behind those very doors, it becomes much easier to feel how near God is, and to acknowledge him as God, and to ponder his love, his benevolence, his mercy. By the same token, we should offer to Satan nothing, not even the time of day. And we might say, “why, I would never offer the devil even the time of day”; but is that so? The expression, “to offer someone the time of day,” means to give them the absolute bare minimum of our attention and our effort. If someone asks, maybe we won’t give them an hour of our time, maybe we won’t give them a lift, maybe we won’t even stop to give them directions, but to not give them the time of day is real rejection. And do we give Satan absolutely nothing? We definitely offer him something with mortal sins; but even with venial sins, we’re giving him just a little bit; not handing over our souls, but not completely brushing him off, either. It’s why venial sins, while not deadly, can still be dangerous. You don’t stop for a casual chat with a murderer who’s on a rampage. And we shouldn’t give even a little of our wills to the devil, because we know that even if he’s only asking for the time of day, he wants much more.

The third temptation: the devil asks Jesus to stand upon the parapet of the Temple, and prove that God the Father will send his angels down to protect him. The devil calls upon Jesus to test the

Father, so that the Father has to prove his love in ways that Satan establishes. We are called upon to set before God, then, as our greatest offering our faith. This may seem relatively easy, but it can be the most challenging offering. It means doing his will, and believing all the while that he will take care of us; that if we give him the first and best of the fruits of the field or of the livestock, that he will not let us go hungry, but that he will provide. It means believing that if we give up some earthly pleasure, that greater satisfactions will await us one day in heaven; it means believing that if we relinquish some of our short time here on earth to perform good works out of love for him, that we will receive endless time to enjoy in his kingdom. We set before God our faith and trust; but in this instance, we set before the devil not an empty offering basket; we set before him utter disdain, and rejection. “Do you reject Satan, and all his empty promises?” That’s part of the profession of faith which we will make at Easter, which we are leading up to now during Lent. Now is the time when we send Satan the rejection notice as he calls upon us to do his will, so that at Easter, we will belong wholly to our resurrected Lord.

Each day of our lives is filled with all sorts of things, with which we may make an offering; a common and strongly encouraged way to begin each day is with a morning offering: O God, I offer you this day all of my thoughts, words, and actions. May they all be according to your holy will, and for your greater glory.” Consider all the thoughts, words and actions of our lives; consider how many of them must be pleasing to God, and how many of them must be pleasing to Satan. He will ask us to set before him, rather than God, our wills and our lives. With the help of God, may we offer him nothing of what we have, but remember instead the words Jesus himself spoke: You shall worship the Lord, your God, and him *alone* shall you serve.”

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