

WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO LOSE?

Invocavit Sunday – Lent #1 (1 Sam. 17:30-51; 2 Cor. 6:1-10; Matthew 4:1-11)

Imagine a shadowy party scene in the background. Glasses clink. Laughter erupts. A probing voice speaks “What do you have to lose?” Vignettes of people at every stage of life, now interviewed, contemplate what a drunk driving charge would mean. Maybe it’s losing your job, self respect, and time in court, time in jail. Maybe it would mean riding home in a police cruiser, an ambulance or a hearse. With the music reaching a crescendo, the message is clear “Everyone has their reasons to stop drinking and driving. Think about yours”.

As we enter the season of Lent, we ought to not just think about that one temptation in the commercial above but the many. Still the probing question applies. What do you have to lose? What do you have to lose by succumbing to temptation?

To think of what all there is to lose, we rewind the Gospel story of the Life of Christ, one chapter. And what do we see? We see the Epiphany of our Lord. A Season of the Church Year showing forth incident after incident of God in Flesh made manifest inaugurated with the incredible scene of the Baptism of Jesus. We hear the tumult of the crowds; the protestations of John the Baptist; the sound of the waters. The heavens are torn open. We see the Spirit of God descending like a dove. And the climax of the whole event was the voice of the Father speaking “This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased”.

What comfort would his baptism have had as he battled Satan! The thoughts of what had transpired so recently would have comforted and strengthened the weaknesses of his humanity as he fought! How glorious was His Baptism! It is recorded in the Gospels that God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit were all present. Luther writes as commentary that “Since it was an event attended by the three exalted Persons of the Godhead, it must be prized and honoured”. More than that, it was an expression of love in the voice of the Father and the affirming of a Sonship that existed from eternity as John recognizes Jesus’ unique status even before the baptism, saying “I need to be baptized by You” and “You are coming to me?”

But the Baptism of Our Lord also says something about our own baptism and our status before the Father. When we are baptized we are baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The three exalted Persons of the Godhead are present at our baptisms also. And God the Father speaks no less powerfully through His Word than he did in the Word uttered at our Lord’s baptism. In our baptism a status is recognized also, not from eternity as with our Lord, but a newfound status at the breaking of the waters and the command of the Father.

By Baptism we are adopted children of God! There can be no higher rank for us to obtain. In the book of Revelation 1:5 we read “To him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.” “And do you not know”, says another Scripture passage, “that you are heirs and co-heirs with Jesus Christ”. Do you not know that you are brothers and sisters in Christ? You are a partner in the Eternal Kingdom?

So when the probing voice of conscience or the warning word of the Holy Spirit comes as you enter the field of battle over your eternal soul, we aren’t being overly dramatic as we say “This is a battle where I have

everything to lose. I could be tempted as the Christ to exchange the sure and certain Word of God for the word of a liar. I could be tempted to exchange the Bread of Life for pseudo bread that cannot satisfy. I could be tempted to take a transitory and temporal kingdom instead of the Eternal. Legion are our temptations. The Gospel reading highlights only three of our Lord's temptations in the wilderness but careful reading of the whole of the New Testament reveals that he had many more as it says in Hebrews "He was tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin".

Have I yet fallen? Paul inspired by God wrote: "All have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God". In response, many have speedily returned to their baptisms to find a renewed washing of their spirits. But the sad reality is that many have fallen irretrievably on this field of battle. With the foe in the foreground we must take him seriously as a real threat. He has a real power to deceive. We think "It won't happen to me?" We think we're smarter than Adam and Eve. Maybe you take them as simpletons unlike yourself. But of all the men who ever lived Adam had the advantage of being formed from the very hand of God. His brain wasn't as tired from all the chemicals in the air. Before sin entered the world he would have had clarity of thought unsurpassed by any of us. Despite all this, he fell into sin. And Scripture speaks of others who had irretrievably fallen from one temptation or another. With the temptation to riches, Paul writes of the many "who have pierced themselves with many griefs and made shipwreck of their faith". But we are not left with nameless faceless masses to contemplate. We hear of individuals like Demas, who following after the things of this world, has left us.

As the rich man of Luke 16 suddenly discovering too late how much he had too lose "lifted up his eyes being in torment" asking Father Abraham to send the beggar Lazarus to dip his tongue in cool waters, we also will soon discover too late how much it really was to lose. Mothers against Drunk Driving regularly show horrific scenes of damaged bodies and families at car crash scenes and are praised for holding nothing back so people can truly contemplate what they have to lose. Similarly the Church must proclaim from her pulpits the reality of the demonic and the eternal sufferings of hell with the question "What do you have to lose?"

There is of course no real comparison. So with everything to lose, we return to the strength of our baptism. Yes, baptism bestows our status, our adoption in Christ as kings and priests as John says in Revelation. But it also bestows real strength as we are in Christ. We pick up the Word as our Lord had done. We do not go into battle unarmed. We have the Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. Is not the shield also stored in the armouries of the world? We have "the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left" as Paul writes in our epistle. We are clothed in the righteousness of Christ who covers us in his protective and shielding cloak of baptism. As we sing so often in the hymn: "Baptismal waters cover me".

Today we sing a militaristic battle song of Martin Luther "A Mighty Fortress is Our God". We take our strength in our Captain who has defeated the foe. In the Old Testament reading, we hear the story of David coming against Goliath, his strength and certainty not so much residing in the ammunition of the five smooth stones but in "the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel". We sing Psalm 91 throughout the liturgy. It also is the soldier's psalm. David speaks of his confidence as he is covered in the shadow of the Almighty. We are covered in the protective cloak of our baptism. Know that you are clothed in the righteousness of Christ! We hear of the two weapons in the epistle reading, The Sword of the Word and the

shield of our baptism. We are encouraged by the spiritual victories of Paul etc. Know of the power of the Word in the Gospel. Engage in battle!

In Christ the evil foe may be defeated. And only in Christ as we reside in Christ and carry his weapons shall we be victorious. But what a victory it shall be. Christ invites us to be part of the victory. We have something to live for. We have something to strive for.

Let me share with you a secret. The victory has already been won. Even at the beginning of Lent we cannot help but contemplate the victory that is ours in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Sundays in Lent aren't actually counted as part of the Lenten discipline of fasting and mortification of the flesh. Sundays are still to be focused, as every Sunday of the year, on the Resurrection of our Lord.

And so we confess in the Creed Sunday by Sunday "I believe in the resurrection of the body". And if Satan be there to dissuade you point to the empty tomb. Point to the prophecies fulfilled. Point to the martyrdoms of the saints shedding blood to witness to the Truth. Point to the longing of the Fathers.

For we see the sure and certain hope of the resurrection was one that sustained the Old Testament Saints also through their struggles in the spiritual life. And so, throughout our midweek services starting this Wednesday we will see the life, death and resurrection of Jesus in the Old Testament readings ordinarily reserved for the Vigil of Easter. We see the "about to be sacrificed Isaac" a foreshadowing of the sacrifice of the Christ with Abraham as God the Father trusting in the resurrection of his son. We see in the valley of the dry bones the resurrection as envisioned by the prophet Ezekiel. We see in Job's testimony of faith a hope in the resurrection. We see in the fiery furnace our Lord's descent into hell proclaiming victory over death.

The victory is ours.

The victory is ours but the battle for our souls rages now. As we struggle with the devil, the world and our flesh in this Lenten Season may we first contemplate as the voice of the Spirit probes "What do you have to lose?" We have eternity. We have our status as children of God, heirs and co-heirs with Jesus Christ. Take up the Sword of the Spirit. Be Clothed in the protective cloak of your baptism. Triumph as David and St. Paul and others.

Stand tall on the Day of Resurrection.

Amen.