

The First Sunday of Lent March 6, 2022

After celebrating Mass in a small chapel in 1884, Pope Leo XIII heard voices near the altar. The cardinals and Vatican staff members who were at Mass, did not hear those voices. All they saw was the Pope standing there with a pale look on his face. What the Holy Father heard filled him with dread. It was a conversation between God and the devil.

Satan was boasting to God that he could destroy the Church if only God would let him. God replied that if Satan thought he could destroy the Church then he should go ahead and try. Satan then complained that he would need God to give him more time and more power. Then God asked him how much time and how much power he thought he would need. Satan said that he needed between 75 and 100 years and that the people who committed themselves to the service of evil would need more power over others. Pope Leo XIII then heard God reply, "You have the time, you will have the power. Do with them what you will."

Shocked by what he had heard, Pope Leo XIII went directly to his office and composed the prayer to Saint Michael the Archangel that we recite at the end of Mass and at other times.

Pope Leo then required that this prayer be recited after Mass to protect the Church and the world from the power and influence of Satan.

The devil is real. He and the other fallen angels hate Jesus and His Church. They will do anything they can to ruin us.

But, we do not need to be afraid. God is infinitely more powerful than Satan. Good is much more powerful than evil and the truth prevails over lies. But, we should be aware of the devil's presence in the world and his intention to ruin us. In his first letter, St Peter tells us, "Stay sober and alert. Your opponent the devil is prowling like a roaring lion. Resist him, solid in your faith (1 Peter 5:8). We should be vigilant but never afraid.

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In today's gospel, Jesus goes to the desert to face the devil and his temptations. The devil does his best, offering Jesus all the pleasure and power that the world has to offer. But Jesus rejects the devil and his empty promises. Why? Because He has confidence in His Father's love for Him. He does not need to turn stones to bread because God will provide food for Him. He does not need authority over the kingdoms of this world because He trusts that God will give Him the Kingdom of Heaven. And He does not have to prove to Satan or to Himself that God will protect Him if He throws Himself off from the roof of the Temple. He has too much confidence in God to do that.

And so, Jesus shows us how we can conquer temptation in our own lives - by trusting in God's unconditional love for us and His promise that He will always provide for us.

The devil tries to tempt us by playing on our fears. He wants to convince us that God has abandoned us. He wants us to believe that God does not have our best interests at heart. He tries to convince us that if we do not sin, then we will be missing out on all the pleasures the world has to offer. But these are all lies. God loves us. If He commands us not to sin, it is to keep us from harming ourselves. The only thing we miss out on by not sinning is harming ourselves or hurting others.

The other lie the devil tries to tell us is that we can't resist him. He reminds us that we are sinners and tells us we are too weak to stand up against temptation. But that is not true. Though we are sinners, we can still say "no" to temptation. Sin only has power over us if we give in to it. If we resist temptation, solid in our faith as St Peter tells us to, then we can overcome it with God's help.

So, whenever we are feeling tempted, it is important for us to ask ourselves, "What lie is the devil telling me?" And we should also ask ourselves, "What is going on inside me that is making me vulnerable to this temptation?" It could be that we have fears that we haven't faced or that our feelings are hurt and we are looking to be comforted. It could just be that we are tired and want the world to go away. Whatever it

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may be, the more aware of it we are, the less power it will have over us.

It is also important for us to remember that we have a helper we can call on whenever we are being tempted - our guardian angel. In Psalm 91 which was our Responsorial Psalm today, we read: "For to his angels he has given command about you, that they guard you in all your ways." The devil is just a fallen angel. Your guardian angel is also an angel who can strengthen you when you are tempted and show you a way out. We should call upon our guardian angel often. St John Bosco tells us, "When tempted, involve your angel. He is more eager to help you than you are to be helped."

The devil has one last trick up his sleeve. If we do give into temptation and sin, he tries to convince us that God will not forgive us. He tries to heap shame and guilt on us so that we hide from God. It is part of the devil's strategy to separate us from God and isolate us. Do not believe him! God is always willing to forgive us. There is no sin so great that it makes our Heavenly Father stop loving us. We can always return to God and expect to be welcomed back to His loving mercy. If it has been a while since you have been to the Sacrament of Confession, do not waste any more time. Go so that you can be embraced by God's mercy and know His forgiveness and love.

Jesus defeated the devil in the wilderness and put an end to his kingdom through the cross. We remember all that Jesus did to save us and so can face the temptations of our daily lives with confidence and determination. God loves us. God always forgives us. And there's nothing the devil can do about it.