

1st Sunday of Lent (March 9/10, 2019)

I should like to begin today with a super compliment to you all Thank you for your huge response to our Small Group Faith Sharing process. What a very gratifying experience. We have just a little over 400 people joining us in the experience that is like 47% of the average number of people that celebrate Eucharist with us on any given weekend ! That is huge and I tip my hat to you all to our staff, especially Sarah O'Donnell, and her assistant Kelly McBride, as well as to everyone of you who have accepted a leadership role in terms of hosting and sharing hospitality with those who come to your homes and to your gatherings. We have a couple (college students) who are studying along with us and a number of individuals who for one reason or another were unable to be in a Small Group, but are joining us in this study.

The core material and the reflections are wonderful. I joined a group on Friday night after the Stations/Fish Fry and had the grace of being part of a discussion that was powerful, and deep and open and sincere. I had the Group that I am grateful to be a part of ... a Men's group on Saturday mornings (8:00 a.m.) and it was equally powerful and uplifting, a great sharing of our faith and hope and the journey we are making.

While the 1st Reading today from the book of Deuteronomy celebrates the material we were all discussing in our Groups this week The importance of Giving thanks to God. The sheer importance of being grateful for all He has given us. Moses speaks to the people sayingWe will give thanks to the Lord by bringing an offering of our first fruits.

“I have brought you the first fruits of the produce of the soil which you, O Lord have given me. And having set them before the Lord, your God, you shall bow down in His presence.” Setting aside right off of the top ... something for the Lord who has given all to us.

Then we have the gospel, Jesus retreating to the desert for 40 days and 40 nightsall in preparation for the beginning of His public ministry. He was hungry at the end, and who appears only Satan, the Devil, the Evil One. There are many interesting philosophical discussions today about the Devil how he is, who he is, and what he looks like none of that matters greatly what matters is there is great Evil in our world, and every

human being feels a tendency or is drawn toward things that they really don't want to do. This description of the Evil One tempting Jesus is very cunning Jesus was hungry when we are hungry for something, the temptation seems to be much greater for that very reason we are hungry.

Let's look at the temptations of Jesus as He was trying to be 'Godly' ...in other words in Communion with God. We looked at the temptations this past week of Ungodliness, and Unthankfulness! The three temptations are extremely subtle..... Bread..... Power..... Worship. We are all aware of the importance of Bread one of the most basic needs of all human beingsand we are all aware of the plight of Hunger in our world there is a great temptation to overlook or not notice the needs of those who are Hungry.

I commend all of you who are engaged in the Backpack Ministry what a powerful opportunity for us to challenge that temptation..... Bread. As a parish community, this is a Mission we have accepted, and we are very capable of fulfilling this task. We still have some details to work out that will make this a lasting and sustainable Ministry. We would like to provide every person who is a member of our parish an opportunity to be involved in this Ministry. Our Mission came into being as a result of some good people coming to a realization, by God's Grace, that there are children here in our own county, Rankin County, who go to bed hungry. While the school provides these kids food during the course of the week, we attempt to provide them food for their weekend, so that they don't go to bed hungry. There are 3 phases to this great Mission which we have accepted! Our people purchase food items for each identified child, (shopping list is provided). They pack those items for each individual, so that each receives the very same, and then they deliver to the school. The school sets the food aside for those identified individuals, who come to the office where the food items are placed in their backpack (so as to diminish any fear of embarrassment) and thus, they hopefully have food for their weekend. What a wonderful Mission for us to engage in we have been especially blessed by the existing Small Faith Groups accepting a leadership role with us! We ask people to be prayerful in all three phases of this Ministry for a fruitful and blessed outcome in this venture. If you are not in a Small Group, you can certainly be involved in this Ministry as many already are. You will hear a lot more about this wonderful Ministry as we move forward.

The second temptation is Power The Devil says : “I will give you all this power and glory.” Wow! What a huge temptation — the quest for power is in our world in large and small areas of life is really big. Power is such a status symbol in this world when used effectively, it can bring great glory to God when used to control, it can bring chaos. How do I use the power entrusted to me in my little part of the world? Does it bring glory to God and Peace to His People?

And finally the 3rd Temptation Worship It brings with it the question, “Who or What do I really worship?” One of the great ways of understanding my experience of worship I can examine two important things in my life My Calendar and My Checkbook. How generous am I with my Time and My Resources ?

The 3 Temptations that Jesus experienced are indeed among the most persistent temptations in each of our lives also Bread..... Power..... Worship! It certainly goes hand-in-hand with our current study! This week, we examine the areas of sinfulness in regard to Anxiety, Frustration, Discontentment! How easily we might say, everybody experiences Anxiety, Frustration, and Discontentment. How could that be a sin? It is just a part of life! Perhaps a little of these might not be a sin But, what does a whole lot of Anxiety, or a whole lot of Frustration, or a whole lot of Discontentment do to my life? How does it impact the possibility of my having some kind of a meaningful Personal Relationship with my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? I pray that your study and focus, and your sharing with each otheryield a very rich Harvestthis week!

—Fr. Gerry Hurley