

JMJ

1st Sun. Lent

+ In today's Gospel passage we see two forces collide in battle, Jesus goes into the desert to battle Satan. This battle, and its outcome, show that the powers of good and evil are not equal, not even close to being equal in power. But the battle still had to happen, because the forces of good and evil is the reality we live in.

Every mythology, any story that's at all interesting, has a protagonist who has to conquer some contrary force standing in the way of his ultimate good or goal. There is always a struggle, a battle of some sort, external, internal or both. But if a story doesn't have within its plot an element of chaos that needs to be ordered, or an evil character needing to be conquered, or a dangerous journey needing to be navigated to reach the destiny...we're not only unimpressed if doesn't have any of that, we don't even bother tuning to a story that lacks those elements. And it's not because stories make reality interesting, it's because these stories speak to reality that already exists.

Our reading from Genesis details the origins of our reality, which now requires us to struggle against sin and temptation if we are to successfully return to God and be victorious. In the Gospel we see Jesus enduring trials and temptations during his 40 days in the desert. Christ though, by fully entering into this reality, brings with him the power we need to be victorious in this reality of ours. Our pilgrimage on earth says St. Augustine cannot be exempt from trial. We progress by means of trials. No one truly knows himself except through trial, or receives a crown expect only after victory.

During Lent we fast, we pray and we take on a renewed effort to resist our temptations. But it would all be pointless, the battle terribly unsuccessful, if Christ had not done all this first. The one who fasted for us in the desert gives our fasting power. The one who allowed himself to

be tempted by the devil shows us how to resist temptations. And by observing him in prayer we come to understand that fruitful prayer points to and brings about doing the will of the Father. Our Lord offers us so much more than just an example though, by becoming fully human he brings to humanity the necessary help.

We're no longer left to ourselves in temptation, because Christ received his flesh from our human nature, in which he experienced temptation. But by his own power gained victory for us in our flesh. He suffered death in our nature, but by his power secured life for us. He suffered temptation in our nature, but by his own power gained victory for us. In union with Christ we have been tempted, but in him we overcome the devil. So don't think just of Christ's temptations, but consider too his victory over them. See yourself as tempted in him, but also victorious in him.¹

He allowed himself to be tempted for the sole purpose of our benefit, to provide our human nature access to his divine power and grace. He went to battle with Satan so that the same battle we find ourselves in may share the same outcome. Christ entered our war and won, but to enjoy that victory we must actively engage the battle that Christ has equipped us for. This is the reality of Lent.

¹ St. Augustine