

First Sunday of Lent

Christian Call to resist the temptations which dehumanize life and livelihoods.

Special Theme for the 1st Sunday

1 March, 2020

1st Reading: Genesis 2:7-9, 3:1-7

2nd Reading: Romans 5:12-19

Gospel Reading: Matthew 4:1-11

MASS INTRODUCTION

Lent comes around each year and presents us with its usual challenge to take stock of our lives, to see more clearly what is in our hearts, and to discover what might be calling us out of our comfort zones. Today we have entered in the first Sunday of Lent and the liturgy invites us to reflect on Jesus' 'forty-day' experience in the wilderness. Jesus is 'filled with the Holy Spirit' and, like so many human beings before and since, is 'led by the Spirit' into the wilderness of life to be 'tested' there.

Temptations, sin and death are the realities of life and how we overcome them, make us victorious like Jesus who powerfully won over devil and his temptations. Caritas India, the social development wing of Catholic Bishops Conference of India has launched the Lenten campaign with theme Sustain Life: Sustainable Livelihood. It calls us to focus on promoting sustainable life for the poor, marginalised, and socially excluded people of our society.

The special theme for today reminds us of our duty and responsibilities towards our brothers and sisters. As we begin our own Lenten journey, let us ask God's grace that he may help us to resist the temptations which dehumanizes life and livelihood, and may we become the promoters of life.

Homily

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus,

The Church observes the Season of Lent as a special season of the Grace of God

abundantly poured upon the believers. Hence, the Church through Fasting, Prayer and Almsgiving invites the believers to embark upon a spiritual journey of repentance, renewal and rebuilding of relationship with God and our sisters and brothers. We as believers make this spiritual journey a refreshing one by meditating upon the passion and death of Jesus, surrendering our lives totally to the Will of God and placing our total trust in the promise of Eternal Life given to us through the glorious Resurrection of Jesus.

The Word of God of today's liturgy place before us the human realities of temptation, sin and death. The first reading from the Book of Genesis speaks to us about God's design in creating our first parents Adam and Eve as innocent and holy children of God. In order to sustain and nourish their life, God creates the beautiful garden of Eden as their habitation. But the devil in the guise of a serpent tempts them. They give into the temptation and decide to obey the evil plan of the devil, leaving aside their total obedience to the Commandment of God. Thus, as a result, they fall out of the grace of God, fall out of their dignity as innocent and holy children of God.

But God does not desert us completely! He does not give up on us forever!! For, our God is a God of superabundant compassion and mercy. And we are his beloved children. When we sincerely repent of our fall and sin and cry out to God as we recited today's Responsorial Psalm, "Have mercy on us O Lord, for we have sinned", God listens to the cry of our heart and forgives us of our transgressions.

The second reading from the Letter of St Paul to Romans explains the purpose of Jesus'

incarnation – his human birth. Jesus came to restore the lost grace and dignity of the children of God. The grace that was lost in the disobedience of Adam, Eve and their children was restored by the obedience of Jesus Christ through his complete submission to the Holy Will of the Father by accepting the death on the Cross as the total reparation for the sins of the world. Thus, Jesus' obedience brings grace, justification and new life to the believers.

The Gospel Reading of today speaks to us about the ways in which the devil - the evil one – tempted Jesus after his forty days of intense fast and prayer as the preparation for his Mission to the world.

The devil who had tempted our first parents Adam and Eve, the devil who had tempted Jesus during his earthly life, continues to tempt us the believers even today. Indeed, weak humans as we are, many times we give into the temptations and the evil designs of the devil. And we fall from the Grace of God!

Some of our modern-day temptations and sins which we face in our lives could be these: the unbridled competition to secure positions of power; the materialistic desire to amass more and more wealth without any moral consideration; the way we abuse the God given natural resources of the earth by polluting of our environment, water and air; the ways in which we undermine the human dignity of people with vulnerabilities such as the widows, the single parents, the orphans, people with physical and mental disabilities and the elderly; the ways in which we deal with and exploit those who work for us or with us, not paying them just wages and not giving them their due rights; our selfishness in hoarding up our excessive wealth and food for our exclusive use and disregarding the immediate needs of our sisters brothers; our failing to promote the common good of others; our failing in our human solidarity. And this list continues...

This Holy Season of Lent seriously reminds us that “we are our sisters' and brothers'

keepers” and that “our earthly life is essentially a communitarian and integrated life of charity and solidarity” and that “we are duty bound to preserve the beauty and biodiversity of the Garden of Eden – the earth – that God had created as the habitation for all of God's creatures – humans and others alike”.

The season of Lent also reminds of our baptismal vocation and Christian mission in this world. Our Christian vocation is essentially a call to resist the temptations which dehumanizes life in all its different forms. On the other hand, proactively we are called to recognize the God-given dignity of all human persons and uphold the sacred worth of life in its forms. And our Christian mission in this world is to transform this world into the Kingdom of God where justice, peace, development, integrity and fraternal human feelings are nurtured, promoted and preserved.

During the season of Lent, Caritas India which is the National Organization of Catholic Bishops' Conference of India for humanitarian action and integral human development initiatives, organizes its annual campaign against hunger and disease in each Diocese. The theme of this year's Lenten campaign is - Sustain Life : Sustainable Livelihood. Sustaining human life and the biodiversity of our mother earth is the part of the Mission of the Church. Sustaining life would mean doing all that is necessary to recognize and promote the sacred worth of human life in all its stages. Sustainable livelihood is the means through which people are able to find the required resources for meeting their basic human needs and the needs of their families.

The Church takes up this mission of sustaining life and sustaining livelihood through numerous initiatives. All the members of the Church, indeed all the believers share in this Mission of the Church. In order to carry forward this mission, the Church has established International, National and Diocesan Caritas and other such social ministry

Organizations.

As we celebrate today the 1st Sunday of Lent, let us renew our Christian faith lived out in concrete actions and our social commitment to recognize, promote and sustain life in all its forms and stages and strive to create opportunities for people especially the poor, the needy and those without employment and means for their sustainable and dignified livelihood options. Let us join hands with Caritas India and other such organizations of the Church's social ministry to give renewed hope to our sisters and brothers who are in need of our love, care, support and solidarity.

Amen.

(This homily was prepared by Fr. Jolly Puthenpura, the Assistant Executive Director, Caritas India)

Prayer of the Faithful:

Celebrant: Dear brothers and sisters, the Holy Mother Church invites us to place our trust in God our loving Father, who is ever at work in his creation. As we begin our Lenten journey, he assures us through his son's victory that he is with us as we walk through the wilderness of life. Hence, with confidence and trust let us place our petitions before him.

Response: Lord, hear our prayer.

1. Let us pray for our Holy Father Pope Francis, cardinals, bishops, priest, religious and all faithful that they may continue to bear witness to your love and mercy specially during this season of lent.

We pray to the Lord. R/-

2. Lord we pray for the leaders of our country that they may promote and sustain life in all its forms and stages and strive to create opportunities for people especially the poor, the needy and those without employment.

We pray to the Lord. R/-

3. For all Christians, that this season of lent may be a time of renewal, a time to

overcome the temptations and selfishness and work towards creating a world where all can live in love, peace and solidarity.

We pray to the Lord. R/-

4. Lord we pray for those who are sick and suffering, who have no employment to earn their living and left without any choice. Help them to cross the wilderness of life and may the season of lent bring hope and new beginning.

We pray to the Lord. R/-

5. "I have come to give life and life in its fulness". Lord we pray for all of us present in this Eucharistic Assembly that enlightened by the word of God we may become bearers of life, life in its fulness to the most marginalised people of our society.

We pray to the Lord. R/-

Conclusion: God of all goodness, we bring before you our lives with all its weakness and strength. Accept all our prayers and petitions. Bless our efforts to promote life, life in its fulness. We make this prayer through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Fasting, that is, learning to change our attitude towards others and all of creation, turning away from the temptation to "devour" everything to satisfy our voracity and being ready to suffer for love, which can fill the emptiness of our hearts.

Prayer, which teaches us to abandon idolatry and the self-sufficiency of our ego, and to acknowledge our need of the Lord and his mercy.

Almsgiving, whereby we escape from the insanity of hoarding everything for ourselves in the illusory belief that we can secure a future that does not belong to us.

Let us leave behind our selfishness and self-absorption and turn to Jesus' Pasch. Let us stand beside our brothers and sisters in need, sharing our spiritual and material goods with them.

MESSAGE OF
HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS FOR LENT 2019



Sustain | Sustainable Life | Livelihood

समृद्ध जीवन: सतत आजीविका

Caritas India, through its annual Lenten Campaign 2020, focussing on the theme – Sustain Life: Sustainable Livelihood invites everyone to join hands and come together to be a catalyst – a change agent - to adopt “Each one Help one” approach in reaching out to attain a sustainable livelihood.

Let us pledge during this Lenten Season to contribute (financially/non-financially) towards enabling a sustained life. This doesn't only mean poverty eradication, but also building the capacity and capabilities of others to withstand the trends and the shocks. It also means that all of us start living our lives with a sustainable approach – by sustainable use of natural resource, reducing carbon emissions by using eco-friendly methods of traveling, reducing/recycling the waste products, enabling community-led initiatives.