

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As we enter this holy season of Lent, our readings center on the theme of temptation and its constant and pervasive feature in our lives. Temptation has been with us since the beginning of time. In its most basic terms, temptation is the bad luring us from the good. In another sense, temptation is really rooted in pride and a lack of humility. In the first reading from Genesis, the cunning serpent sows the seed of doubt in the woman. “Did God really tell you not to eat from any of the trees from the garden?” Once the woman says the fruit from the tree in the middle is not to be eaten, the serpent tells her, “God knows well that the moment you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods who know what is good and evil.” Implicit in this statement is the lie that with this newfound knowledge, Adam and Eve no longer need to rely upon God. There is a supreme hubris and arrogance in this disposition; there is also a lack of thanksgiving and gratitude on the part of Adam and Eve for all God had given to them. Dominion over all earthly creatures was not enough for them; they wanted more. Their act of disobedience, that original sin, separated humankind and is restored only by the coming of the New Adam, Jesus Christ, who is perfect love and perfect obedience.

The “Blessing of Water and Invocation of God over the Water” in the baptismal rite includes this prayer: “May this water receive by the Holy Spirit the grace of your Only Begotten Son, so that human nature, created in your image and washed clean through the Sacrament of Baptism from all the squalor of the life of old, may be found worthy to rise to the life of newborn children through water and the Holy Spirit.” By the gift of Baptism, we are reborn and configured more closely to Jesus Christ. His obedience to the Father, his total self-giving and surrender binds up the separation of our first parents and so restores our relationship with God. In order to most fully live out our Christian identity, humility is an essential aspect to making this a reality.

A few weeks ago, I visited the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of Our Lady in the Outer Richmond District of San Francisco. After praying I purchased a book called *Season of Repentance: Lenten Homilies of Saint John of Kronstadt*. He offers this timely reflection: “And this is a new and the strongest motive toward humility: I am a sinner, and God is just. How can we not keep in mind the judgment of God, which may be ready to be accomplished in us this very day, and not forget, perhaps, the most insignificant of good works, which in comparison to our many sins does not mean anything; because we sin every day without fail, we sin every hour in word and deed, with our thoughts and with our feelings. Give us, O Lord, to have constantly before our eyes how we are totally and completely dependent upon You, to have constantly before our eyes our weaknesses, our sinfulness, in order to constantly humble ourselves before You and before our neighbors.” What a beautiful and edifying prayer to reflect upon this Lenten season!

My prayer for each of us is that we take this privileged time to renew and restore our Christian life. May we take the opportunity to experience spiritual activities in the parish, including the Sacrament of Penance, our Lenten Friday meals, Stations of the Cross on Fridays and our Parish Mission. “...how much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of justification come to reign in life through the one Jesus Christ. In conclusion, just as through one transgression condemnation came upon all, so, through one righteous act, acquittal and life came to all.” [Romans 5:17-18].

–Fr. Tom