

First Sunday of Lent (B)
St. Athanasius and St. Francis Parishes
February 21, 22, 2015

Last weekend was Valentine's weekend, and Fifty Shades of Grey opened in theaters. (What a 'valentine gift' to our culture!) The movie grossed \$93 million at theater box offices last weekend. We live in an interesting and from my point of view conflicted world, when what we get the weekend of Valentine's Day and the weekend just prior to Ash Wednesday is a movie like "Fifty Shades of Grey". Were any of you tempted to go? I won't ask how many did go!

All that being said, temptation is the focus of today's gospel. While short, it is very to the point:

"The Spirit sent Jesus out toward the desert. He stayed in the wasteland forty days, put to the test there by Satan. He was with the wild beasts, and angels waited on Him."

Applying this to our experiences of today, and to our culture in general, it seems that we also live in a 'wasteland' and still contend with beasts of one kind or another. During these days of Lent we will be put to the test. But we must take hope in the last words of today's gospel: "*and angels waited on Him.*" Angels will wait on us as well.

Today's other Scriptures give us assurance of this. In the Noah story from Genesis, God placed a rainbow in the heavens to let the people know that He was still with them. The rainbow was a sign of this, an assurance of His presence. In 1 Peter, our second Scripture, we hear:

"Christ suffered for sins once....but now has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers subject to him."

Jesus is on top of things, and Jesus will hold us up, even as we live our lives in what often seems a 'wasteland', even when we feel we are among 'wild beasts'.

Where are the places of struggle for true disciples today? They can be at home, in the market-place, in government, and in the Church. But maybe more helpful than keying in on 'places', we might better think of 'attitudes'. It seems that it is with 'attitudes' that the real struggle goes on today.

What are some of these attitudes?

1. AVOID SUFFERING AND PAIN AT ALL COST....

Euthanasia and abortion are offered as easy fix solutions to old age, death, and unexpected or unwanted pregnancies. We attack, even kill, those with whom we have disagreements and misunderstandings. We imprison offenders rather than create programs and processes to rehabilitate them. Working through difficulties

seems to require too much time and effort for us today. The easy fix often seems to be the preferred solution. Yet the easy fixes do not often bring peace.

2. ADDICTIVE, COMPULSIVE BEHAVIOR RATHER THAN RELATIONAL BEHAVIOR

We work and compete for success; more gifts, and more activity. Yet these will never solve the relational strain that exists in a marriage, between children and parents, etc.

3. CONFUSING WHAT IS MORAL (MORALITY) WITH WHAT IS MERELY LEGAL (LEGALITY)

If the law permits something, it is often seen as a good. Nothing is really wrong until you get caught doing it. And, if you can get around getting caught at something, it must be okay to do. This is a good area to think about now that we are in tax season.

4. WHAT WORKS IS THEREFORE RIGHT AND GOOD.

This is pragmatism at its best. It is foundational to American society, but totally contrary to the gospel. (The cross was not the most practical way to achieve salvation, nor was it the easiest way to achieve salvation. A simple word from God might have accomplished the same.) And the flip-side of pragmatism is “the end justifies the means”.

5. THINKING THAT PEER PRESSURE IS SOMETHING THAT ONLY YOUNG PEOPLE EXPERIENCE OR FEEL.

Even as an adult I buy into trends in society and economics without the slightest thought that I am doing it mostly because everyone else is, and I will be seen as not keeping up with the rest of the pack if I don't.

To deal with these issues in a Christian way, to deal with them as a true disciple, is not an easy task. It takes courage to be a disciple. One place we can find this courage is within community. Of course community, and friends, can also lead us down the wrong path. But good faith friends are also a great help to us in living through the wasteland of culture and standing tall against the beasts of selfishness, negativity, and violence. It is not necessary and it is not good to try to live the Christian life alone. The support and guidance of one another is important. The courage I need is available to me through the power and witness of a faith community. I see and feel that I am not in this struggle alone – I am with you, and you are with me. Together we can risk being with the wild beasts, for we know that angels await us, even the angels of one another living in community. Who are your faith friends? How do you depend on them for courage in life's struggles?