

1st Sunday of Lent, 6 March 2022

Scriptures: Deuteronomy 26:4-10; Romans 10:8-13; Luke 4:1-13

Homily: Fr. Ken

This week-end we start the first week of Lent. Many of our sisters and brothers not only in Ukraine but throughout the world are asking: "Where is the God we call merciful?"

There is the story of Jewish prisoners who were forced to watch an execution. SS guards hung two men and one boy. The adult men died quickly, but the child who was too lightweight was still breathing. The boy lingered writhing before their eyes, for more than a half hour.

One Jew asked: "Where is merciful God? For God's sake, where is God?" Another Jew later recalled his silent response to the question: "Where is God? This is where—hanging here from these gallows".

When we reflect on this, we find that within these sad, sad words, there is also an affirmation of God's love. God so loved the world that Jesus was sent to be one of us in all things but sin.

Even in Auschwitz, God was there, embracing the boy, one in his suffering, one in his sorrow.

In the New Testament, St. Paul celebrated the oneness of God with us in Christ, as did the author of Hebrews. This unity was affirmed at the Second Vatican Council, and it is repeated in the Eucharistic Prayer used for the Mass on this First Sunday of Lent.

Today, and every First Sunday of Lent, we remember Jesus being one with us in every way, but resistant to sin. Jesus' temptation, as told by Luke in today's Gospel, illustrates the willingness of our Lord and Brother to experience the human condition on our terms

so as to teach us how to rise up against evil in all its forms and to overcome it. "He overcame for us in order to overcome in us, so deeply did he share our humanity."

Near Jericho in modern-day Israel, one can observe the traditional Mount of Temptation. A monastery on the side of the mountain houses a tiny chapel in a cave. It is there that Jesus is said to have spent 40 days and nights fasting, praying, and meditating on what lay ahead for him as he struggled to discern and obey God's will.

In all of this, Jesus was alone at the beginning of his battle with evil just as he would be at its climatic end on the cross.

During Lent, this story will continue to be told, and in the telling, we are invited to regain our perspective. We remember our ancestral roots; we trace their ups and downs; we look inward and try to learn not to make the same mistakes; we remember all the while that humankind has never been alone. We repent; we are forgiven; we gratefully praise our God.

In the second reading, Paul—in his correspondence with the several house churches in Rome—reaffirms the constancy of God's mercy and nearness to every sinner without exception. We sinners, for our part, are to believe and confess: Jesus is Lord! Jesus is risen! Jesus, in his dying & in his rising, has saved us all!

As we are now moving forward into the season of Lent, we are also reminded from the Gospel story, that as the first of a new humanity and the leader of the faithful followers, Jesus in his temptation experience did not deplete his spiritual resources.

He emerged with spiritual power, ready to take on evil in all its manifestations.

With the power of that same Holy Spirit, each one of us can be ready to do the same.

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