

***The Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time
The Twenty-First Sunday After Pentecost (Latin Mass)
October 17, 2021
Year of the Eucharist and Parish (Reflection #40)***

“Then the devil took him up to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in their magnificence, and he said to him, ‘All these I shall give to you, if you will prostrate yourself and worship me.’ At this, Jesus said to him, ‘Get away, Satan! It is written: The Lord, your God, shall you worship and him alone shall you serve.’ Then the devil left him and, behold, angels came and ministered to him.” (Matthew 4:8-11)

As the wily serpent curled its body upon the tree branch staring at the young woman in her innocence, he crafted a plan which would lead to her downfall. His words hissed ever so sweetly from his forked tongue: “Why are you letting Him tell you what you can and cannot do? Are you not an independent person; so smart and lovely? If only you would take a bite; a nibble, then you would know real freedom. A freedom that He does not want you to have for you will be just like Him. Bend the knee of your will, take a bite, and I will give you what you want.” *“The woman saw that the tree was good for food, pleasing to the eyes, and desirable for gaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate it; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.”* (Genesis 3:6). And with that done, their eyes were opened as the Devil slid away confident in his victory: “How could the Creator of the universe ever marvel again at these lowly, filthy, ugly creatures?” Never could Satan have imagined that God would choose the child of the Woman to restore the relationship this woman had just spurned.

I begin our reflection this weekend upon the third temptation of Christ using this imagined dialogue between the serpent and Eve. It is my hope that we may grow in our appreciation of what Jesus won for us, not solely His victory over temptation in the wilderness, but the lesson He gave to us that day and, more importantly, His glorious victory over Satan and death as He died upon the cross. It is this third temptation which, I find, harkens back the most to the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden as described in the Book of Genesis — “Bend the knee; I will give you what you want.”

The lesson — Satan can never grant to us that which our heart most desires. Yet, the cunning serpent offers to we gullible creatures the same temptation he

offered to both Eve and Jesus. Bend the knee, I will give you what you want. The knee, we understand as both our intellect and our will. The want he proposes to fill, always leaves us empty. So often it comes with invisible strings attached. Strings such as regret, grief, addiction, and despair which can hold us down robbing us of the freedom he initially proposed to provide. And this is how Satan works. He comes as a dear friend, a boon companion just there to assist us. He informs and reminds us that God is an over-bearing parent with all of His “Thou shalt nots.” Satan whispers so softly: “I will walk with you, I will listen to you, and I will help you to discern what will make you happy. Just bend the knee; go along like everyone else. They scratched my back and I scratched theirs. Only a fool would attempt to fight city hall.” And no matter how many times we have fallen to his suggestions, his spirit of the age, we still walk hand in hand with him, who now becomes our accuser, down the road to our destruction only stopping every so often to admire the scenery of a land scarred by broken promises and empty dreams.

Yet Jesus turns away from what Adam, Eve, and we do not. For Satan could never give Jesus what He wanted — US! Jesus wanted a relationship with you and I so much that He desired with His whole being to embrace the instrument of His own death and our salvation — His Cross. The hollowness of Satan’s words to us, “Bend the knee,” are answered by Jesus who chose, in our place, to stand, firmly grounded in the knowledge that His own death would become the means of providing us life; eternal life with Him. No longer an over-bearing parent, His commands provide us the freedom we have desired since the Garden. A freedom to choose. A freedom to choose a life lived with Him. A freedom, although still freely shunned when we sin, yet a freedom to be His, ever still. Today and every day, let us bend the knee of our intellect and will to Him who deserves our love for what He has done for us. And if we fall, let us ask His help to arise and continue our journey. Remember, He fell three times on the way, getting up each time because He thought of You.