

Homily (guest: Fr. Carlton Beever)  
March 6, 2022  
1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent  
21:38 – 27:12

Numbers have a special significance in our lives, even though at times we don't realize it. We speak about a child, their "Terrible 2's." Or 15, or 16: adolescence. Twenty-one, the age of legality. 65 or 70, the age of retirement. And whether we admit it or not, numbers are important to us. We attach significance to them. All of us probably have our own "lucky number." Or the lucky numbers maybe we play when the Powerball gets to an astronomical figure. There are numbers we use for our alarm code at home, or passwords on the computer. There's actually even a fear associated with the number "13." Nobody ever wants to stay on the 13<sup>th</sup> floor of a high-rise.

So, it probably shouldn't surprise us that the Bible attaches special significance to numbers, too. Lent always begins with this Gospel story of Jesus going out into the desert for 40 days to fast and to pray. In Jewish numerology, the number "40" symbolizes a period of testing, trial, renewal. And it also links Jesus to many other events in the Old Testament.

Think about how many times the number 40 is used: the great flood of 40 days and 40 nights that washes over the earth, to wipe away sinfulness, to renew the face of the earth. And Moses fasted 40 days on the mountain before he received the Ten Commandments from God. The 40 years the Israelites traveled in the desert on their way to the Promised Land.

And so the story of the temptations is meant to inspire in us that these 40 days are a time for us of trial and also spiritual renewal. And the manner in which Jesus begins this, I think, provides a perspective for our beginning, too. The Gospel does not say just, "Jesus went into the desert..." It says, "he was filled with the Holy Spirit." He was impelled. He was driven. He was led to go into the desert. In other words, we don't just stumble upon the season. This is a season of grace for us, just as it was for Christ. Grace has brought us to this moment. And we are led, we are driven, we are impelled by that same Spirit. And these days present an opportunity for us to step back, to pause, to reflect upon the impact that Jesus' message has or has not had upon us.

When you think of a desert, you think of a place of dryness, of extreme heat and at night, extreme cold, a place to be alone, a place of danger, a place where you could die, a place where you could discover yourself. And in the desert, Jesus was just as human as the rest of us. He identified

himself with the very human desires that we face. It says that Satan coaxed Jesus to satisfy himself with material things, to be self-reliant, to avoid pain and suffering.

And if we think about temptations, they are simply distractions from what is our true objective. They're shiny. They're attractive. They can devour us. And they stem from a sense of entitlement and selfishness: I should be first. I should take what I need. I should be Number One. And sometimes temptations are so subtle that we are able to convince ourselves that we have a good reason to do something which we know is not good.

In the response of the temptations that Satan placed before him, Jesus said, "You shall worship the Lord your God and your God alone shall you serve." And so our Scriptures today, as we begin the season of Lent, are a challenge to us to consider, to whom do we belong?

**Whom do we serve?**