

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 4:1-13.
(R1) Deuteronomy 26:4-10. (R2) Romans 10:8-13.

When our Lord was baptized, the Holy Spirit came upon him in the form of a dove. The Spirit came not in fire as on the first Pentecost, but as a dove. For the dove was the symbol of Israel (Psalm 68:14). Jesus was the new Israel.

As Moses led Israel out of Egypt into the desert, so the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the desert. Israel spent 40 years in the desert; Jesus spent 40 days. Israel was tempted in the desert and failed; Jesus was tempted in the desert but was victorious. In other words, St. Luke is telling us that Jesus, the new Israel, was a turning-point in salvation history.

Remember William Blatty's book *The Exorcist*? It begins with an archaeologist examining a mound in ancient Assyria. He excavates an amulet: a green stone head of the devil Pazuzu. Then the scene shifts to Washington, D.C., to a girl, Regan, possessed by a devil. The devil is driven out of the girl. The point of the story was that before Christ the devil was worshiped; he boasted to Jesus that the kingdoms of the world were his; he had conquered the pagan world — "Your gods are demons," said the Psalmist (96:5). But after Jesus, the devil is exorcised, he is dri-



a word for sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

ven out. His power is circumscribed.

In the desert Jesus showed us how to conquer the temptations of the devil. He did three things: He fasted, he prayed, and he used Scriptures.

Fasting comes from the Hebrew word meaning to "shut one's mouth." The Greek word means "not to eat."

Fasting can mean voluntary abstinence from food. It is spiritual calisthenics. We have a fallen nature, our passions are strong. Either we rule them or they rule us. Better to be the hammer than the anvil: the one in control, not the one beaten down. Fasting puts us in control.

Fasting need not always be from food. We can give up smoking, alcohol, television, or eat something we don't like. The Hebrew word for fasting meant "to shut one's mouth." That can be a real penance

at times. To smother a sharp retort, gossip, unkind words, profanity, belittling someone, criticism. The best fast is from sin: premarital sex, contraceptives in marriage, drunkenness, drugs and so on.

And when we fast, Jesus said that we must do this joyfully and cheerfully, not to be seen by men.

The second weapon our Lord used was prayer. Prayer and fasting go together like two legs or two hands or two eyes. As the plant needs water so the soul needs prayer. Prayer is the oxygen of the soul.

Prayer need not be much. Better some prayer every day than a lot of prayer only once in a while. The constancy of the dropping water weareth a hole in the rock. There are three times a day that we should pray: morning and night, at meals and in times of temptation. Our Lady recommends the family rosary. Whoever prays consistently will never lose the faith, nor his or her soul.

Finally, in every temptation Jesus quoted the Scriptures. The devil with his astuteness perceived the power of the word of God and so in the second temptation, he also quoted Scripture. The author of Hebrews said: "The word of God is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword ... able to discern the reflections and thoughts of the heart" (Hb 4:12). A

verse a day can drive the devil away.

The devil never sleeps. We shall be tempted. But we shall always be victorious if we fast, pray and read the word of God. These are the three things by which faith stands firm, devotion remains constant and virtue endures. Prayer knocks at the door. Fasting obtains. And the word of God defends what you have received.

Father Shamon is administrator of St. Isaac Jogues Chapel, Fleming.

Daily Readings

- Monday, March 2**
Leviticus 19:1-2, 11-18;
Matthew 25:31-46
- Tuesday, March 3**
Isaiah 55:10-11; Matthew 6:7-15
- Wednesday, March 4**
Jonah 3:1-10; Luke 11:29-32
- Thursday, March 5**
Esther C:12, 14-16, 23-25;
Matthew 7:7-12
- Friday, March 6**
Ezekiel 18:21-28;
Matthew 5:20-26
- Saturday, March 7**
Deuteronomy 26:16-19;
Matthew 5:43-48

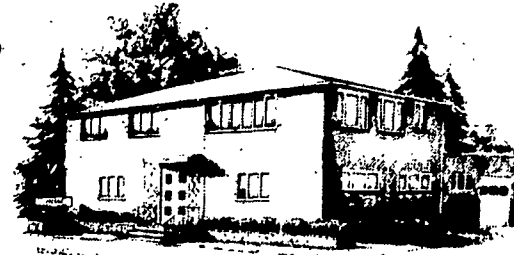


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