

HOMILY ~ FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT FEBRUARY 17/18, 2024

*When all the world is a hopeless jumble,
And the raindrops tumble all around,
Heaven opens a magic lane.
Somewhere over the rainbow,
Way up high
There's a land that I heard of once,
In a lullaby.
Somewhere over the rainbow,
Skies are blue.
And the dreams that you dare to dream
Really do come true.*

What do you think is over the rainbow? I think it is heaven, where all our dreams will come true. In the First Reading, we pick up after Noah's Arc and the aftermath of the flood. The rainbow is a sign of God's covenant of love and caring for us. It is a sign of our salvation. It is a fresh start for the world. Lent can be a fresh start for us, and that magic lane from heaven is Jesus. He came to teach us how to live and love and how to get to heaven.

In the Gospel Reading, we hear that the Spirit drove Jesus into the desert for 40 days to be tempted by Satan. The significance of being in the desert is that he had no distractions. He could focus upon the temptations. Temptations do not have to make us fail. If we respond to temptations in a positive way, they can make us stronger. After the 40 days of temptation, Jesus tells us that we are to repent and believe in the Gospel. Let's talk about how we can repent and believe.

When we are tempted to do something wrong, we frequently have a knee jerk reaction. Sometimes we react by habit. That may be a bad habit, or maybe it was a good habit at one time but it is no longer working for us. Sometimes we react based upon our emotions, and it may not be a good reaction. We need to stop and examine what we are feeling and how we are about to react. Believe that God will help you make a good decision. Pray about your response. Pray about what you want the outcome of the situation to be. Repent about the bad reaction you were about to make, and change your response. Most of the time we can delay our reaction. We want to move our knee jerk reaction to something that is well thought out. Repent of our bad behavior and believe that God will help you find a better reaction. Let's take few examples.

You have a friend who tends to be late for things. You were meeting them for dinner, and they were almost an hour late. They did this the last time you met them for dinner. As the minutes pass, you get more and more angry. When they do arrive, you tell them that they are a very inconsiderate friend, you are not going to be disrespected like this anymore and you storm out. They try to call you a couple of times during the next week, and you ignore the calls. You do not want to forgive them, so you are going to give them the silent treatment. Let's look at this. You could have recognized your anger, the fact that you wanted to respond in anger, pray about the situation, think about what you want the outcome to be and react in a more constructive way. You really had plenty of time to do that. You had almost an hour before they got there. What do you want the outcome to be? You probably want the person to respect your time and continue to be a friend. Giving them the silent treatment now is not going to accomplish that. You need to repent of your behavior, let go of the anger and resentment, forgive and call your friend.

Another example: Say you have a family member who belongs to a different political party than you. At a family gathering, you start talking politics with them; and you have a very strong emotional reaction. You cannot believe that anyone could be so stupid as to hold these beliefs. You have a heated conversation, and you both say things that you should not have said. Everyone at the gathering was extremely uncomfortable, and it spoiled the gathering. You have not spoken to them since, and another family gathering is coming up. You need to look at your emotional response, and pray about the outcome you would like to have from this situation. Maybe what you would like is for them to change their mind, but that is not likely. Maybe what you want is to do is to treat one another with respect, accept the differences of opinion and not ruin another family gathering. Do you really want to give up going to these gatherings or give up your relationship with a family member for politics? It may be best to repent and have a discussion in advance of the gathering and just agree to disagree.

So, when you are tempted and want to give a knee jerk reaction, delay that knee jerk reaction. You may need to have a five minute, ten minute or 24 hour cooling off period. Take it to prayer. Decide what you would like the outcome of the situation to be. Make a better, well thought out choice.

Love and Peace,

Fr. Jim