

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT MARCH 5TH 2017

THEME: THE CAR

PART I

The following is an unabridged version.

Recently I was driving on the 118 freeway to downtown Los Angeles during the recent rainstorm. Cars and especially trucks kept spattering my windshield, and at a certain point my windshield washer reservoir was empty. Fortunately I keep a small reserve in the trunk, and that was enough to get me to my destination safely.

This episode suggested to me an image, a parable for Lent. What occurred to me was this: What if we compared ourselves to a car?

CONFESSION

Lent is a privileged time for confession. **It's rather** like going to a car wash. A good thing an excellent thing, obviously. But Lent is more than that. Every year at this time our spiritual OBD light (on board diagnostic) light goes on so-to-speak advising us that something needs attention. We need to take our souls in for service.

This is a time to renew our spiritual energies to recharge our battery. We usually adapt certain practices –prayer, -penance, -charity designed to help us accomplish this.

It is time to see better where we are going. So while you're charging the battery and the hood is up anyway, fill up the windshield fluid reservoir. This might involve reading or study, a retreat or other forms of spiritual guidance.

It is time to improve the quality of the ride. A realignment is in order, of our priorities and values. Proper inflation of tires will help, carried out, ironically by a proper deflation of our pride.

It may be time for an oil change as we seek and find ways to help a virtuous life function as smoothly and as naturally as possible.

It is time to observe the various warning lights: brake fluid, temperature (usually too cold) transmission problems (Adjusting to changes in life.)

Maybe the fuel light is on. This is where prayer and the Eucharist comes in: more if possible, but in any case better, deeper richer.

Modern odometers do more than indicate your mileage. They can tell you your average miles per gallon (are you getting all you can for your fuel?), your average speed (too slow too fast), and your current range, i.e. how far you can go on the amount of fuel in your tank, or how far will your current spiritual reserves be able to take you?

And while you are at it, clean out the trunk! Get rid of the junk and excess baggage that takes up too much space in your life.

The very next verse after today's second reading reads, "What then shall we say?" Shall we persist in sin that grace may abound? Of course not!

Most people don't take chances with their cars. We prefer not to put them to the test. Why would we take chances with our souls?

So, this Lent let's go back to the dealership, better still the manufacturer, the CREATOR, maybe not for a complete overhaul, but for annual service all covered by a warrantee that never expires!

As the GPS in our cars sometimes **speaks** to us "**Make a U-turn (that is...change course)** at the first available opportunity." Finally it announces "RECALCULATING" and are friends again. Maybe that is what Lent is all about.

AMEN.

THEME: LENT

PART II

Today's first reading from Genesis takes us back to Adam and Eve in the Garden of EDEN. It tells the story of the very first sin, the original sin. This reading is also the story of every sin, about every person here loss of innocence.

Haven't we all experienced the same things as Adam and Eve? There is a time of clear conscience. Then comes temptation...the urge to taste the forbidden, to experience the unknown, to grasp for the illusion of maturity. Maybe it happened when we had our first smoke, our first drink, maybe our first theft or maybe even our first infidelity.

The promise of temptation is I would become godlike somehow more mature and I gave in. It promised one thing, but delivered something else, and we experienced the fall. At that moment we lost something and realized we were naked. We came to see how fragile, suggestible, limited, weak and how easily tempted we are as our sin distances us from the God we once knew so well. As the Catechism says the essence of that original sin was attempted by Adam and Eve to be like God, but without God. The heart of my every sin is the desire to be like God but without God.

We all have experienced the innocence of the Garden the temptation and taste of forbidden fruit and then the fall when we realized we were naked and in need of grace. The fall is not just a moment in Genesis, but in every life here.

The Gospel reading is also about temptation, but with a different ending. Jesus went into the wilderness of Judea, and there He also was tempted. But **in this instance**, the result was victory. Jesus was tempted three times in the desert, and three times He won. These too are temptations

we all here know well. Homilies interpret them differently. But maybe we can see them as some of the temptations of Lent.

The *first temptation* is to turn the stones to bread.

Why fast during Lent?

We all know the lure of this temptation in a society driven by consumption. Jesus quotes Scripture to give us a great truth "do not live by bread alone." There is more to us than what **food** we eat, **what clothes we** wear or **what car we** drive. There is a place inside us called the "hole in the soul," a place only God can fill. To keep a serious Lent with its fast and abstinence is not old fashioned. It is very modern, a declaration of independence by us from the grip of consumption. Giving up something for Lent is not about self-punishment, but about a freedom that liberates my soul and make space for God.

The *second temptation* is to jump from the Temple, to compel God to do something for us. If you are going to pray, forget about the difficult work of conversion in my life. Go for the quick grace, instant results "microwave spirituality." Jesus quotes Scripture to say "you shall not tempt the Lord your God."

There is no express lane to redemption without repentance. There is no way to bypass the need to change how we live in order to experience grace in my life.

The *third temptation* is to seek the kingdoms of the world in the illusion that **somehow** fulfillment comes from power and control. Jesus shows us a different way," to do homage to the Lord alone." Fulfillment comes from following the Lord in giving something of ourselves to others. We are serving God when we are helping others.

Lent is a time when we face the temptations of consumption (stones into bread) the temptations of instant spirituality (tempting God) and the temptations of power and control (the kingdoms of the world). In these temptations **which** come to everyone's life here, we can fail like Adam and Eve or know victory in Christ.

We all know the failure of Adam and Eve. We will come to know the power of Jesus Christ in our life if we are generous in our fasting, prayer and almsgiving. Temptations will never go away. They are part of my life and are found everywhere, even in Paradise. **[Temptations in Paradise?]** They travel with me wherever I go. Victory over temptation, however, is not found everywhere, but comes only in Jesus Christ. The result of a serious Lent is a deeper union with the victorious and Risen Christ.

Temptation and failure are part of my life. Now St. Paul says because of Jesus Christ, grace and spiritual victory can be mine as well. AMEN.

All email comments to Fr. John are welcome.