

1st Sun of Lent...Repent of What?

Introduction...

We Catholics are now in the Season of Lent... a very special season for us. This is a season when catechumens enter final preparations for being baptized at the Easter Vigil.

For those of who are already baptized, it is a season of preparation and renewal as we look forward to renewing our own baptismal vows on Easter Sunday, the feast of our Lord's victory.

How do we prepare for this during Lent?

In today's Gospel Jesus announces

Repent and believe in (be faithful to) the Good News.

Response... If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

I Repent

In the Gospel we find Jesus in the desert, being tempted.

Jesus himself was tempted to "sin."

Unlike Adam and Eve, Jesus did not give in to temptation.

In today's Gospel Jesus urges us to "repent."

"Repent" means to change our ways.

How are we tempted?

How do we need to "repent?"

We are tempted to sin.

We need to repent of our sinfulness.

The problem is that in our culture today "sin" is no longer an operative word.

"Sin" doesn't mean too much to many people.

What are your "sins?"

What "sins" do you need to repent of...

how do you need to change your ways?

Response... If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

II What Is "Sin?"

When we talk about "sin" we need to ask ourselves...

Can *our* God make demands on us?

Most people believe in God.

But their God is a very *tame* God,
who doesn't make too many demands on them.

What demands does God make on people?

Why should we try to walk in God's ways?

Why should we try to do God's will... after all, don't we pray,
"Thy will be done?"

Let's go back to "sin."

What is sin?

Sin is basically placing our will ahead of God's will.

So often we want to do it "our way."

Sin is our rebellion against God and God's will.

Let's get down to specifics.

What is God's will for us?

How do we sin against that?

God gave us the Ten Commandments –

not suggestions, but commandments.

Can we even name the Ten Commandments?

The Ten Commandments are God's instruction book...

God wants us to flourish. Sin causes us to diminish.

We believe that God is our loving creator –

God knows what is good for us.

We don't run the show... God's does.

What does that mean?

That means that our lives are not just about ourselves...

We are not God.

One time while I was working in our retreat center in the Bronx

a woman came on retreat on a Friday evening.

Our receptionist asked her what she wanted to get out of the weekend
retreat.

She answered, "I want to find out who God is and who I am"?

On Sunday afternoon as the woman was leaving the retreat,

the receptionist asked her how she liked the retreat experience.

She answered, "It was a great weekend."

"Did you get the answer to your question?"

"O yes," the woman beamed. "I found out that God is God, and I am not."

"Sin" gets this backward.

We become the god of our life.

Ten Commandments?

We don't even know them, seldom if ever think about them, and seldom make an act of contrition...

O my God, I am heartily sorry for having *offended* Thee.

How do our sins offend God?

We offend our loving creator –

and Jesus tells us that God is our loving Father –

we offend our loving Father by not following his instruction book.

Jesus tries to simplify things for us by saying that

the Commandments can be summed up in these two:

"Love God with our whole heart

and love our neighbor as ourselves."

The Ten Commandments describe actions that are not loving:

killing or hurting people, stealing, coveting...

having other gods that we dedicate our lives and energies to... money, power, sex, self-centered life-style... and so forth.

These actions are "sins."

Our Catholic tradition describes many of these unloving, sinful ways of behaving as the *Seven Deadly Sins* –

deadly "sins" because they offend God, hurt others, and hurt ourselves:

envy, greed, lust, pride or arrogance, sloth or laziness, anger and gluttony.

This is not how God wants us to act.

This is not God's dream for us.

Regrettably, our culture doesn't even consider so many of these actions wrong.

Let's look at *lust*.

What's wrong with a little Internet Porn, how's it hurt anyone?

It's not Adultery, it's "fooling around" – after all, boys will be boys, and desperate housewives will be desperate housewives.

What's wrong with greed?

We never have enough money –

and you have to get your piece of the pie –
the bigger the piece, the better you can live life.
If you live beyond what you can afford, so what?
Isn't everyone doing it?
And if you have to push the envelop, do some creative accounting, skirt the law, cook the books, and create a financial house of cards... heh, you're doing your thing, you're doing it your way.

I could go on and on... you get the point.

Of course, the problem is that "sin" has consequences.
How many families has adultery wounded...
not just spouses, but children and extended family members?
People are hurt. Families are weakened. Our whole society suffers.

How many men get addicted to Interned Porn –
a 3 billion dollar a year industry in our country?
That's \$100 a second.
How many men have trouble relating maturely and respectfully and lovingly to women?
How many men treat women as boy toys?
And how much money do women spend on cosmetics and clothes, thinking that they have to "package themselves" stylishly to be worthwhile and lovable?
How many women fret and worry because they don't look like models?
How often is sex engaged in as a form of recreational play among men and women not even committed to each other – hooking up?

Men and women end up depressed and lonely people,
looking for love in all the wrong places.

Is this our Creator's will for us?

Response... If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

III Another Problem Arises... Responsibility

Here's another problem.
When we don't recognize that so many of these behaviors are *sinful* and have harmful, and at times disastrous consequences, we don't take responsibility for our harmful actions –

"That's just the way I am",
"Everyone else is doing it,"
"I didn't mean to hurt anyone" –
we don't take responsibility for our actions,
we don't realize how harmful they can be,
we end up hurting others even more,
and we don't "repent" – change our ways.

We don't realize that we can choose to act otherwise,
we don't realize that it's not just about us,
but that it's also about God,
and that we can turn to God for help,
and maybe even turn to others for help and advice.

We don't realize that Jesus loves us and is on our side –
that he wants us to repent – and "Believe in the Good News."
Ah, we're back to today's Gospel.
What is the Good News?
We don't have to be "mastered by sin."
We don't have to do it alone.
We can know God's will and follow God's ways –
with God's help.

Response... If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

Conclusion

This Mass reminds that Jesus died for our sins –
Jesus took our sins to the Cross,
and won God's forgiveness for us – that's how much he loves us?
How could we humans make up for offending our God?
How could we ever approach God's awe filled presence – sinners that we
are?
Jesus shows us the way... Jesus has saved us from our sinfulness if we would
only approach the Cross, repent, then believe in the Good News...
Our sinfulness need not depress us.
We need not deny our sinfulness.
With the help of Jesus we can choose to walk in God's ways.
And Jesus wants us to help each other to do this...
Jesus said, "By this all will know that you are my disciples, that you have
love for one another."

From the Desk of Donald Ware, C.P.

In our "sin-less" culture, we need God's help and the help of each other to follow in the footsteps of Jesus –
to be loving, compassionate, caring people,
who know that we are sinners,
but who know that we are so much more –
and are called to be so much more.

Let's ask Jesus to help us,
To strengthen us,
To heal our sinfulness...
And to be the kind of people our loving Father wants us to be.
At communion time invite Jesus into your heart and ask his help, especially during this Season of Lent, a time of repentance.

Response... If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.