

"No Fear Factor at All!"

Do you remember the old TV show called "Fear Factor?" It was hosted by Joe Rogan – and it aired on NBC from 2001 to 2006. They tried to revive it in 2011 but it tanked. They tried a third time in 2017 on MTV. Every single episode was filled with tests and challenges to all of the contestants – that were somewhat gruesome. They started with a physical challenge, then the second one was to mentally challenge for the contestants, and lastly an extreme action type of challenge. It was a show that pushed it to the limit, to be sure.

When you think about a physical and mental challenges, let's go all the way back to the beginning, in Genesis. In chapter 3, the serpent pushes the woman by challenging her physically – talking about eating, and then her memory and then her ability to resist an extreme challenge. He said to her *"Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'"* The woman said to the serpent, *"We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" (Genesis 3:1-3)* He jumps this and her messing up of her words – because she added something God never said. God never said, *"and you must not touch it."* You see, she was not there when God spoke. Let's look at what God did say when He spoke to the man: *"You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."* (Genesis 2:16-17) And so the serpent sees the opening – and tells her *"You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."* (Genesis 3:4-5) The mental challenge is unique in that the serpent is offering something in a way that is calling God a liar.

What happens next is truly uncanny. It is the extreme challenge – because *"When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it."* (Genesis 3:6) We often say that Eve went to her husband and talked him into it – but no – he was right there – he was just as guilty as she was. The serpent planted the seed and both the man and the woman ate it. She saw it, ate it and gave it to the man – who was with her. The succumbing to the temptation was by both of them, they failed the extreme challenge and in doing so caused the sin of disobeying Almighty God. And as they say – the rest is history!

In today's Holy Gospel of Luke – after Jesus was Baptized in the River Jordan by John the Baptist, we find *"Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry."* (Luke 4:1-2) Now remember, this was a Man born of Mary, and He had hunger and thirst, just like us. Satan is at it again, only instead of appearing as a serpent, he comes to Jesus as himself, because he could not hide from Almighty God. He tries his same old game of "Fear Factor" with Jesus – Going to the physical,

The First Sunday of Lent- March 10, 2019, Year C

then the mental challenge, and finally the extreme. He tries to capitalize on the fact that Jesus is tired and hungry.

In the first challenge or temptation: Satan was asking Jesus to change stones into bread. This temptation really seemed like a good idea to him, to feed what would most probably have the immediate desire of anyone who was fasting - food! Jesus was being presented with an instant “want” instead of what a person truly needed. Sure, food would have been really satisfying, but Jesus knew that the world needed so much more than food, they needed His spiritual food; they would need to hear His teaching, not because He enticed them with food, but because He offered them life; eternal life!

And then came the second temptation which was even more dramatic; the devil asked Jesus to worship him, and he would give Jesus authority over all the kingdoms of the earth. Let's get this straight here - the “father of lies” said that he would surrender control and that Jesus would be in charge of every kingdom of the earth? The “father of lies” is trying to tell the King of the Universe “I am going to give you all of this!” Like he just might even turn that over to Jesus, right? He said that Jesus would then be the One who would rule every country! All He had to do was acknowledge that the devil had control of the earth, ever since that challenge in the Garden of Eden. But Jesus knew that He would change the course of history in a far more important, personal and dramatic way; with what would be coming up in just three years; He, Himself, would suffer and die on a cross and then His Heavenly Father would raise Him from the dead, defeating the devil's control of this earth, and over sin and death!

Jesus was tempted to take the easy way out, to avoid the cross, and then He could make the changes to this world all by Himself, instead of working through His church. Sometimes this temptation is very difficult for us to overcome and it is easier to just do things ourselves. Sometimes it is easier to do that than it is to trust - instead of fully trusting God's plan for our lives!

Now comes the big one, the third temptation or challenge was the most dramatic and extreme, taking Jesus to the top of the Temple, the highest part of the Temple in Jerusalem. The devil told Jesus *"If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here."* In other words “dive off the temple tower and let God the Father perform a dramatic rescue mission.” This would show that God could be manipulated to do whatever we want and need, like a short order cook – night and day. Wouldn't that be appealing to huge groups of people who like to hear that God will make us successful and happy when we ask? How many like to take the easy way out and have God serve you instead of you serving God. Some folks would love to bargain with God, make deals with Him. “If you do this – then I will do that.” “And if you do this then I will do this and this!” It makes us seem like we are the boss, and in essence you sell God a bill of goods. How blessed we are that Jesus would have none of that – and instead Jesus' response to Satan was absolutely crystal clear: *“You shall not put the Lord your God to the test!”* You see, nothing was going to make Jesus avoid His mission on our behalf. He gave His all – for the ones He loves – all of us!

The First Sunday of Lent- March 10, 2019, Year C

We need to remember that none of us ever has to do this life alone. I want to encourage you that Jesus said: "*And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*" (Matthew 28:20) the last words of the Gospel of Matthew. You see Jesus is promising each one of us that you are NOT in your mission alone! He is in it with you and me. Some might say "oh Matthew chapter 28, that is the Great Commission!" I like to say this really should be called the "Great Co-mission, based on Jesus' words right there "*and surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*" Jesus will never leave us or forsake us! I want you to hear the words that Jesus spoke before He ascended to the Father from the Mount of Olives. Jesus said: "*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*" (Acts 1:8) Don't give in to the temptation to not share Jesus with others! You see, Jesus is right there with them, and with you, and His Holy Spirit strengthening and protecting you. There should be no Fear Factor at all!