

LENT SUNDAY I "A"  
FEBRUARY 29/MARCH 1, 2010

Today's story from Genesis known as the "fall", St. Paul's words in Romans, the source of the later Church doctrine of "original sin" and the Gospel story of Jesus' own struggle with temptation—are traditional points for reflection at the beginning of Lent. St. Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuits, offers a perspective on all of this in his meditation "The two standards." He describes the standard of the devil and then the standard of Christ. It would be like the athletic jerseys on two different teams. And he asks us which team we want to play for.

The devil, in order to recruit players, promises that those who play on his side will receive riches, honor, glory and power—the same things promised Eve and Jesus. They will be famous. Everyone will worship them.

Jesus, on the other hand, plays his game differently. His is not something fantastic. Jesus doesn't tell us we will be stars, celebrities, in this life. Instead, he tells us that playing with him is about humility, love, service to others. Jesus does not lie to us; he takes us seriously.

In the Bible the devil is called the father of lies. What he promises, or better, what he makes us think, is that if we do certain things, we will be happy. And later, when we think about it, we realize that we weren't happy at all. That we were up against something which, far from giving us happiness, made us feel more empty, even sad.

The devil is a con artist, the original "fake news" correspondent. He makes promises after promise, but he never delivers. He'll never really do anything he says. He doesn't make good on his promises. He makes us want things which he can't give, whether we get them or not. He makes us put our hopes on things which will never make us happy. That's his game, his strategy. He talks a lot, a real "talking head", offers a lot, the ultimate salesperson, but he doesn't deliver.

The devil is a con artist because everything he promises us is divisive, it is about comparing ourselves to others, about stepping over them in order to get what we want. He is a con artist because he tells us that we have to abandon our friends, and never to stand alone.

Everything is based on appearances. He makes us think that our worth depends on how much we possess.

Then we have Jesus, who asks us to play on his team. He doesn't con us, nor does he promise us the world. He doesn't tell us that we will find happiness in wealth, power and pride. Just the opposite. He shows us a different way. This coach tells his players: "Blessed, happy are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake." And he ends up telling them: "Rejoice on account of all of this!"

Why? Because Jesus doesn't lie to us. He shows us a path which is life and truth. He is the great proof of this. His style, his way of living, is friendship, relationship with his Father. And that is what he offers us. He makes us realize that we are sons and daughters. Beloved children.

Jesus does not trick us. Jesus knows that happiness, true happiness, the happiness that can fill our hearts is not found in designer clothing, or expensive brand-name shoes, or the brand and model of car we drive. He knows that real happiness is found in drawing near to others, learning how to weep with those who weep, being close to those who are feeling low or in trouble, giving them a shoulder to cry on, a hug.

Jesus knows this world is filled with competition, envy and aggression; true happiness comes from learning how to be patient, from respecting others, from refusing to condemn or judge others. This is what being on Jesus' team is about. *(Pope Francis, 12 July, 2015.)*

Today we must decide once again which team we will play on.

1 March 2020  
Father Jim Secora