

**1st Sunday of Lent - A - 2023**  
**Genesis 2.7-9;3.1-7///Romans 5.12-19///Matthew 4.1-11**

→People danced in the streets...strangers embraced each other, as if they were members of one large family at a reunion....

→old men wept, youngsters exchanged high-fives, children watched in wide-eyed wonder as the city erupted into unfettered joy...unleashed by so many years of torment and disappointment

→*The curse has been broken...*they chanted...and it was true....at last the dreaded curse had been reversed...the Chicago Cubs had won the 2016 World Series against our beloved Cleveland Indians (as they were known back then).

→I recall this because today (Saturday) is the first game of Spring training...which causes many to wonder if this might be the beginning of a baseball season where we too might be celebrating in late October the same...will we maybe know that same feeling????

→“Cursed”

→have you ever felt.....as if something or someone was tracking your every step, haunting your life with whispers of past failure, robbing you of your hopeful dreams and your inner peace?

→for the Chicago Cubs...it was the mythical curse that hung over the team ever since 1945 when the bar owner of the Billy Goat Tavern...with his pet goat was denied entrance into Wrigley Field...upon being denied, the owner said the Cubs are going to lose this series and never win another World Series again...that is until 2016

→....for Cleveland... some say the Rocky Colavito trade in 1960 is what began the “curse” on Cleveland....

PAUSE....

→[regardless]....it might cause us to wonder...if we ever felt cursed...I don't mean cursed in the voodoo magic sense with someone sticking pins in an image of a doll...

→but rather.....a sense of being "cursed" with our own past failures...

→at times we might feel as if we can never outrun the shadow of our sins....the scars from a shattered family...the soiled reputation from a foolish decision...the trauma of a broken relationship...

→some mistakes have a way of hanging around...like an albatross around our neck or a scarlet letter on our chest.....they tend to remain ever with us...

→and as a result we often feel cursed by our sins...doomed to repeat them...trapped forever in a cell of our own making...

PAUSE

→our scripture readings today speak to this condition...and to its solution

→our first reading from Genesis presents us with the story of creation when God "formed us from the dust of the ground."

→we follow Adam and Eve in their struggle against temptation and the shame they experienced after their fall from grace

→in the second reading, Paul speaks of the consequences of that fall and elaborates on how the power of one person's choice resulted in sin and death for all:

→[we hear]/////////"just as sin came into the world through one person, and death came through sin, so death spread to all, because all have sinned."

→and finally in the gospel, we hear about Jesus being led into the desert to be put to the test

→we hear [about] Jesus being tempted to satisfy the demands of the body, to satisfy his faith in God, and to satisfy the desire for worldly splendor

→not surprisingly...the temptations Jesus faced are often similar to one's that you and I face in life as well

→yet [as we hear] Jesus was able to resist and turn away from them and by doing so...becomes changed and different person...with a renewed heart.....

→how we deal with temptation...how we resist and avoid them...how we turn away from them, as Christ did, will also result in you and me becoming a changed and different person...a person with a renewed heart

PAUSE

→Lent is a special time for us to deal with the temptations of our lives

→a time to reflect on the temptations and sins we experience.....in whatever form they may be

→and to begin to turn away, resist, and avoid them

→the purpose of Lent [as I see it]...is two-fold...

→[first]....it is about penance...realizing what we have done wrong...getting rid of those habits, attitudes, thoughts, and actions...we don't like about ourselves...

→and [second]... it is about conversion...changing and growing in our faith life...turning back and renewing our relationship with God.

→and both of these –penance and conversion – need to go hand in hand if we are going to truly capture the meaning of Lent...

→that is the message of our readings today: reform your lives (penance) and believe in the Good News (conversion)

→and so today I would like to offer this challenge to you and to myself for this Lent...

→I would challenge us to give something up for Lent that is going to lead to a conversion ...--to growth...and rediscovery... in our lives

→to do so...I think we need to move beyond giving up a particular **“thing”** for Lent...and instead be challenged and focus on conversion...

→and so...instead of giving up chocolate or ice cream...maybe we need to heal the hurt of anger and jealousy that we may have...

→instead of giving up going out to eat...let's decide to go out of our way to be nice...

→instead of giving up candy ....let's give up stubbornness...

→instead of giving up junk food...let us heal the hard-hearts and bitterness we sometimes carry with us

→in a word....instead of giving into our temptations....what if we begin to deal with those things in our lives that need to be changed....so that our path in the wilderness will lead to an Easter filled with joy

PAUSE

→ ...we have...once again...been graced with this holy season of lent....a time for change and conversion of heart...attitudes and thoughts.

→the time to follow Christ by example...deed and ....prayer...

→these are the Lenten blessings of this season....

PAUSE

→the story of Jesus' temptation in the desert is put before us at the beginning of Lent to encourage us to follow his example

→temptation is all around us...part of everyday life....but Lent is also a part of us...providing us the opportunity to make a difference in us and those around us

→may this Lent be a TIME for us rise from the ashes we put on our forehead this past Wednesday and begin a changed way of living

→the curse was eventually lifted from the Chicago Cubs...some day it might even happen for our beloved Cleveland Guardians....

→for now...through fasting, prayer and sacrifice the curse of our sinfulness is being lifted and broken

...→and may this Lent....bring about a change in all of us...may our path in the wilderness result in a joyful journey to Easter and eternal life.