

## Lent.1

Quite often we get calls or e-mails at the rectory from people who are looking up their grandparents or great-grandparents. They run like this: "I am looking for the baptismal record of my great-grandfather who, I believe, lived in Woonsocket in the 1870s. His name was John Allen and he married Sarah McGuire in the 1890's, perhaps in your church" Sometimes we can oblige. The record is there, along with the signature of the priest who performed the ceremony. The records are interesting in that sense too, that you can see who the priests were at that time in the parish. There are pages upon pages signed by our most famous and longest-in-office pastor, Fr. Michael McCabe. He was pastor from 1855 until his death in 1893, with the exception of three years, 1866 to 1869, when he served at St. Patrick's in Providence. In 1879 he was named Vicar General of the Diocese, but apparently he did that while continuing as pastor here. His plaque is on the wall at the main entrance of the church. A year or two ago I realized that the secretary, in all innocence, was signing my name in the baptismal and marriage records. She didn't realize that she was depriving me of my spot in St. Charles history. I wanted my own John Hancock on those records.

Our readings today treat this theme of roots. In the first reading from the Book of Deuteronomy Moses is portrayed as telling the people what they must do when they appear before the Lord in the new land which the Lord will give them. They are to identify themselves before the Lord when they appear before Him to offer the first fruits of their harvest by reviewing their history. Of course the purpose of this review is really not to remind the Lord of who they are but to remind themselves of their own identity: “My father was a wandering Aramean who went to Egypt with a small household....”

In the second reading Paul reminds the Christians at Rome what a Christian is. The Christian is the one who adheres to the word of faith which Paul and others preach, and that is to confess with one’s mouth that Jesus is Lord (the sacred name of God now applied to Jesus) and to believe in one’s heart that God raised him from the dead.

Our Gospel scene today, the temptation of Jesus in the desert, is also a matter of roots in this sense, that Jesus is here portrayed as tempted by Satan to pursue the way of power, glory, self-aggrandizement, and arrogance. Jesus rejects these overtures of Satan and chooses instead to follow the dictates of the Law, for he

answers Satan each time with a quotation from the Book of Deuteronomy. He will not use his power for his own self-aggrandizement by turning stones into bread. He will not worship himself by pursuing power and glory, but will worship his Father. He will not put his Father to the test by throwing himself down from the temple's parapet and expecting to be miraculously saved by God.

So we are told what Jesus will not do, and that of course is a clue to what he will do, just as our decisions not to go certain ways in our lives is always a choice to go another way. Our rejection of one way is the acceptance of another. It is a question of heads or tails. By rejecting these temptations Jesus is choosing to be a different kind of person, a different kind of messiah. He will not be a person or messiah of glory and power. He will be a man, a messiah, of suffering and death. And the only light in his choice, the only comfort and consolation it can offer him, is his belief that the Father will in the end protect him and bring him to victory and life.

We could ask ourselves today on this first Sunday of Lent how we are doing with our own choices. Are we Christians? Do we confess with our lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in our hearts that God raised him---and will raise us---from the dead? If we do not make

that confession, if we do not believe in the resurrection, we have lost our Christian identity, our Christian roots. And at this time when our diocese is asking us to invite others to return to or become members of our church, it is always good to make sure that we ourselves are ourselves in the church. In short, we have to preach to ourselves before we can preach to others. After all, we, the members of the church, are in the end the only advertisement that the church can offer the world. If people don't like what they see when they look at us, they are not going to look any further.

Our faith teaches us that God deals with each of us individually. Our lives are one long, uninterrupted conversation with God. God speaks to us in the depths of our hearts. Our job is to listen to His voice. We call it listening to our conscience. So, when we listen to our conscience, what is God asking of us? What does the Lord want us to do or not do? What are the choices God wishes us to make? What are the choices which God wishes us to reject? And we must not wait for a divine tap on the shoulder. No, we must do our best with what our minds and hearts tell us. Even if we make a mistake, we will have done so with the intention of doing what God asks of us, and that is enough. And in our attempts to listen to this divine voice, our norm is always the Lord Jesus himself. Thus this much is clear. If we choose a path which He rejected, if, for

example, we choose a path of selfishness and the pursuit of glory and power, even in small ways, we are going the wrong way. Then we are not confessing with our lips that Jesus is Lord, and we are not believing in our hearts that God raised him and will raise us from the dead. As we begin our Lent, it might be a good thing if we all pray a little more and ask God to improve our hearing of His voice so that so that we can lead lives modeled on Jesus himself.