

The old Baltimore Catechism asked: Why did God create us? The answer was: "To love God with our whole heart and our neighbor as ourselves" (summation of the Ten Commandments). That is the reason for living. That is the road to happiness, loving God, thanking God for His creation, and loving those whom God loves, especially the poor and the suffering. If you want to be happy, enter deeply into the desert of Lent. Ask yourself real questions about who you really are, and answer them honestly. Perhaps there is a relationship with your wife, your husband, with children, with parents -- how can you improve on them? You can give up chocolates for Lent, but it is much better to make spiritual sacrifices, those necessary to mend your relationship with God and heal relationships with those you claim to love. Strive to expand your horizons beyond the limits of yourself. Reach out in gratitude to God and in love to other people. In this way you will be released from the cage of your narrow little self and find a deep joy and a peace and freedom that the world cannot give. God Bless You!



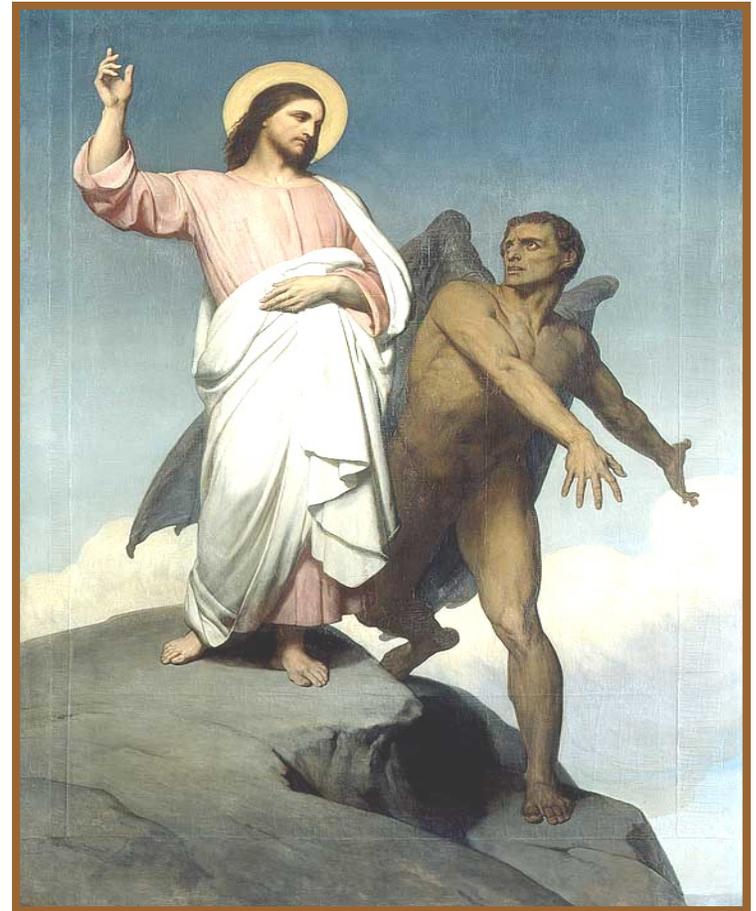
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Please feel free to contact me if I may be of any assistance to you.

*"We love to bear her name and take part in her work,  
which is the work of her Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."*

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## ***THE DESERT OF LENT***



***"For all the work of their hands repay them;  
give them their deserts.  
Because they consider not the deeds of the Lord  
nor the work of his hands,  
may he tear them down and not build them up..."***

**Ps. 27: 4-5**

## ***THE DESERT OF LENT***

Reflections by a Marist Priest

Wednesday, February 22, 2012 we celebrate Ash Wednesday. The Gospel reading for the day is taken from Matthew 6: 1-21. In part, it reads as follows: Jesus said to his disciples: "Take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them... When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites... so others may see them... When you fast, do not look gloomy..."

After such a gospel reading I feel like saying nothing. What else can be added? What is the Lord telling us? He is saying: "Do not be a fake! Do not be a phony! Do not be a Pharisee! Do not be a hypocrite! Be transparent! Be authentic! Be real! Do not have a divided heart. Give of yourself fully, do not hold something back for yourself, for your personal glory.

The forty days of Lent are modeled on the forty days and forty nights that Jesus spent in the desert being tempted by Satan. What is so special about the desert? Well, there is a lot of sand and wide open spaces. The desert is a place where you cannot hide. The desert is a symbol of transparency. Lent is a desert time during which we stop hiding from ourselves, a time when we put aside all our masks and disguises, our phoniness and fakery, and ask ourselves: What is really ruling my life? What makes me tick? What are my real values? Who am I following, Satan or the Lord?

How can you know whether you are following Satan or the Lord? One way is this: if you are always unhappy and not at peace, you are probably following Satan. If you are fundamentally at peace you are following the Lord. In his Epistle to the Galatians, Saint Paul says: "The fruits of the Spirit -- the signs of the Spirit -- are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, trustfulness, and self-control." If you are experiencing these virtues in your life, you can be sure that you are following the Lord. If, on the other hand, your mind is wrapped around yourself, around me, me, me; if your every statement begins I, I, I; if you make yourself the center of the world, number one, then you are probably following Satan. If your heart is full of gratitude toward

God and your actions are in service to your fellowman, you are following the Lord.

The way into big-time selfishness begins slowly and grows and grows. A few years ago, during a frigid winter, a drain pipe behind our rectory in Boston froze up. An icicle developed on that pipe drop by drop, until a gigantic, humungous icicle had built up. It was five stories high. Each day we looked at it and wondered when it would come crashing down. It crashed the day before the Super Bowl and took down our television cable. Using a shovel I tried to clear the huge pieces of ice out of the alley. But they were too big. Then a man approached me carrying an axe. I thought: Great. He will crack the large pieces of ice into smaller ones. But no -- he lent me the axe. So I hacked into the huge pieces of ice with the axe and the next day I discovered muscles I never thought I had. But this immense icicle reminded me of our spiritual life. How selfishness can enter our life drop by drop and unless we clear it out quickly, it can grow and grow until our spiritual life comes crashing down in grave sin. We go from smaller sins to bigger ones. And then only an axe can take care of it, only a major surgery.

We have all kinds of wonderful technology today, all kinds of media. It is called the information superhighway. But by the same token the Internet provides the world with all kinds of pornography of the most disgusting kind. And many become addicted to it. And each night television shows us a world of people in whose life there is no hint of religion. Both of these medias teach Satan's road to happiness -- consumerism, base pleasure, all kinds of aphrodisiacs, violence, ambition, pride, greed and celebrity. But somehow it does not work. The Brittany Spears and Paris Hilton's even the Whitney Houston's of this world are not happy. They are often depressed and troubled and turn to drugs. Only the saints claim to be happy. Sex, money, fame and power -- all of these make promises, promises that they cannot keep.