



A THOUGHT FOR LENT 1: 2020
“FOOD, IDENTITY AND WORSHIP” (MATTHEW 4: 1-11)”

What do you make of the young man who inherited a piece of land from his father but felt that it was rather too small? His mind was set to explore ways of expanding the estate. An offer came from an unusual visitor who paid a courtesy call and promised something bigger but under certain conditions. The young man was instructed to walk across the neighbouring plots as fast as he could and come back to the starting point, which was his late father’s grave on the farm. The only condition was that the two-way trip would last till before the sun went down on that day. Seeing the rich fields in the distance, the young man set out without taking any provisions or saying goodbye to his family.

Initially, he set to cover nine square kilometres in a day, but after a short while he decided to make it twelve, then fifteen and finally twenty square kilometres. Hungry and with his legs aching he continued. With only a few minutes left before the sun went down, he gathered all his strength, ran back, stumbled across the line, and emerged as the new owner of twenty square kilometres of land. Immediately he collapsed on the ground, dead close to his father’s grave. The stranger smiled and said, “I offered him all the land he could cover and was greed for more but I have kept my pledge.” The stranger, whose name was Death, quietly vanished. (*How Much Land Does A Man Need?* by Leo Tolstoy)

Similar to Jesus, every Christian is tempted in three important areas of life: Our need for food, our need for identity and our need to worship. All three are manifest in us and our response to each one of them will determine how we live out our lives. The fast for forty days brought Jesus to the ‘edge’ of his mental and physical strength. Jesus Christ became vulnerable and every Christian is none exceptional.

While food is one of the basic needs for human survival, it represents only a part of the material wealth that every ‘normal’ human heart craves for. The desire for more food leads to obesity while others have very little food and none on their tables. Jesus had committed himself to fasting and prayer, a time to exclusively seek God. Jesus clearly made a choice regarding who and what was going to direct his life. There is a choice to be made between listening to the Devil who

promises us the joys of having plenty of our material needs, or to God whose will we must obey. The young man in the story was obsessed with the passion for more land for which he gained at the expense of his life. He lost what he had before, what he thought he had gained and ultimately, he lost his life. What a shame!

Our need for identity compels us to be recognised as SOMEBODY and not as a NOBODY. Jesus was tempted to use his identity as the Son of God to his advantage. He had to show that he was SOMEBODY: “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written: “He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.” This would have shortcut the Cross, a path of suffering in order to redeem God’s people. Jesus chose to be NOBODY by declining to use his privilege and identity for self-glory. Many a times people who do great things but remain anonymous and avoid the limelight are least recognised. The young man in the story above lost his life because he wanted to be a great SOMEBODY, having the largest piece of land.

Our in-built need to worship something leaves humanity vulnerable to the sin of worshipping the wrong thing. Here is the final temptation: Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.” If this is what happened to Jesus, what would have been our answer if we had been confronted with the same? Who are we going to worship between God and the Tempter? As humans we often are tempted to be in charge – in some form or other. Aligning what we believe and worship to the priorities we make can be a real challenge. The young man in the story vested all his life in wealth building and spared no thought for his personal relationship with his Creator. Keeping some balance between the competing demands of a busy job and the need to better ourselves on one end, and the neglect of nurturing our faith in God on the other hand, remains the vocation of every Christian.

PRAYER: *Almighty God whose Son Jesus Christ fasted forty days in the wilderness, and was tempted as we are, yet without sin: give us grace to discipline ourselves in obedience to your Spirit, especially at this time when we are faced with the ravaging Coronavirus that we experience your power to save us. Grant knowledge and wisdom to all medical professionals to find a cure quickly. Amen.*

From: Michael Mbona, Fr (Rector), 29 February 2020