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**From the Selected Works of Reverend Lawrence E. Frizzell, D.Phil.**

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Winter 2008

# Celebrant's Guide and Commentary and Reflections for Sundays and Festivals (February 10, 2008)

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# **Celebrant's Guide and Commentary and Reflections for Sundays and Festivals**

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**THE FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT**  
**February 10, 2008**

*Reverend Lawrence E. Frizzell*

**INTRODUCTION TO THE MASS**

During the season of Lent the Church reflects on the public ministry of Jesus in the light of his Death-and-Resurrection. This is the foundation for each Christian to deepen appreciation for the sacrament of Baptism and its ongoing importance for the life of faith and service of God and neighbor.

**INVITATION TO REPENTANCE**

How have we used the divine gifts that came through our Baptism? Our lives have been ordered anew toward God the Father through the work of Christ. We acknowledge our need of divine mercy and forgiveness for our sins and failings.

Lord, we have sinned against you: Lord have mercy.  
Christ, show us the Father's mercy and grant us your salvation.

**HEADINGS FOR THE READINGS**

**First Reading (Gen 2:7-9; 3:1-7).** The divine gift of intellect and free will includes the necessity of a human response. The challenge of a test led the first parents to a false choice and dire consequences.

**Second Reading (Rom 5:12-19).** The contrast between the sin of Adam and the perfect obedience of Christ inspires Christians with the model to follow; moreover, the free gift of God through Jesus provides assurance of success.

**Gospel (Mt 4:1-11).** By the baptism of John, Jesus became the Servant who took up the burdens of sinful humanity. His response to three tests with words of Sacred Scripture give a basis for our struggles.

**PRAYER DO THE FAITHFUL**

**President:** Heavenly Father, through Baptism we share in Christ's intimate union with your will. In our weakness, we pray for the strength to follow him and present these petitions on behalf of the Church.

**Reader:**

For Pope Benedict and all bishops, may your gift of truth guide them in the Church's living of the Gospel, we pray to the Lord.

For all Christians, may their response to the gifts of Baptism inspire others to deeper faith, we pray to the Lord.

For all who are preparing for Baptism in the Easter Vigil, that they may be guided by their teachers, sponsors and friends to love of Christ, we pray to the Lord.

For all who exercise works of charity, especially in ministry to the sick and suffering, that their deeds may be fruitful, we pray to the Lord.

For all members of this parish who have died recently and for our deceased family members, we pray to the Lord.

**President:** Merciful Father, you sent your Son to heal and reconcile a broken world; may all your faithful people find this season of prayer and penance to be a stimulus for greater devotion to your will, in imitation of Christ the Lord. Amen.

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE LORD'S PRAYER**

Jesus taught us to invoke your Name as our privilege. Together we pray as he taught us:

## **INVITATION TO THE SIGN OF PEACE**

The blessings flowing from Christ's Word and Eucharistic presence demand a response by imitating his deeds of loving service. May the sign of peace bring us to the faith that works through love.

## **COMMUNION REFLECTION**

Eternal Father, may Christ's gifts in Baptism and Confirmation bring us ever closer to the ideals of loving service of our neighbor. Renewed by this Eucharist, may we pursue the works of justice and mercy that reflect your truth.

## **FINAL BLESSING**

May this Eucharist draw us more completely into the mystery of divine Life. May divine gifts of faith, hope and charity imbue our response to God's call.

## **COMMENTARY**

**First Reading (Gen 2:7-9; 3:1-7).** The creation narratives in Genesis offer profound theological insights into human nature and answer questions for every generation to ponder. Thus, when the Church rejected the neo-pagan ideology of National Socialism in Germany, Pope Pius XI referred to the biblical doctrine of the unity of the human race. The Second Vatican Council reiterated this teaching: "All people form but one community. This is so because all stem from the one stock which God created to people the entire earth..." (*Declaration on the Church's Relation to Non-Christian Religions*, no. 1). The harmony of the first parents with God led to an ordered experience of the natural world. This is signified by the talking serpent, who tricked the woman into a discussion. Temptation usually begins with a question that cannot be answered with a clear "Yes" or "No." The commandment of God (Gen 2:16) was expanded by Eve by putting a fence around it: "You shall not eat it *or even touch it*, lest you die!" (Gen 3:10). The longer one dallies with temptation, the more attractive it becomes. Thus a false road of pride and disobedience led to alienation from God and spiritual death, with a series of ripple effects down through the generations.

**Responsorial Psalm (51:3-6, 12-17).** This crown of the penitential psalms, attributed to David, begins with a humble confession of guilt and continues with a plea for interior purification and the divine guidance to respond to the gift of right order in life.

**Second Reading (Rom 5:12-19).** The solidarity of all in a community, the profound bond between leaders and subordinates, is explicit during Israel's wandering in the wilderness after the Exodus from Egypt (see Num 12:1-15). St. Paul knew that the choices of leaders have an impact on a community from one generation to the next, so this ancient doctrine is applied to the situation of the entire human race. The first parents failed to appreciate the gift of communion with God, so humanity bore the burden of spiritual separation from God and the loss of harmony with neighbor and the natural world. However, prophetic hope for a Messiah, an anointed leader to bring victory and peace to Israel, provided Christian theologians with the key to an understanding that triumph over evil and reconciliation with God was procured for the entire human race through the righteous act of Christ, "the One who was to come" (Rom 5:14).

**Gospel (Mt 4:1-11).** Jesus rejected temptations that we all face in our daily lives. The three scenes illustrate important lessons. 1.) Special gifts and powers must be used for others in the service of the one God, not for selfish gain. 2.) Trust in God's care must be complemented by prudent care of our health and safety. Thus Jesus rejected the sin of presumption when tempted to risk his life needlessly. 3.) So many are willing to set aside moral principles in order to gain wealth and power! Jesus refused to enter into allegiance with evil in order to possess "the kingdom of the world". The meaning of human life is found in service of God. "The Lord, your God, shall you worship and him alone shall you serve" (Mt 4:10, quoting Deut 6:13).

Matthew records three texts from the Book of Deuteronomy in the responses of Jesus to the devil. In rejecting the misuse of Psalm 91 by the devil, he shows that even the Scriptures, torn from their context, can be used deceptively. As we listen ever more closely to God's Word in a spirit of prayerful attentiveness, we will come to understand aspects of the Paschal Mystery more profoundly. We may also be able to help others to set aside a cheap or inadequate approach to the Scriptures.

## REFLECTION

The distinctive nature of each season in the Church's year can be noted by any observant person but the content of symbols, gestures, sounds and colors must be taught. It is the special privilege of parents to share the various levels of the Church's heritage with their growing children.

The Second Vatican Council presented the liturgical season of Lent as follows: It has a twofold character, recalling our baptism or preparing for it and stressing a penitential spirit. "By these means especially, Lent readies the faithful for celebrating the Paschal Mystery after a period of closer attention to the Word of God and more ardent prayer" (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, no. 109). The Paschal Mystery is an ancient designation for the Death-and-Resurrection of Jesus in fulfillment of God's plan and understood in the light of the Passover (*Pascha* in Aramaic). In the period just before Jesus, Jews used an Aramaic term rendered as "mystery" to describe the divine plan that was unveiled slowly so that the human race could appreciate the marvels of divine mercy. The Good News of Jesus' life, deeds and teaching revealed this mystery or plan that was kept secret for long ages (see Rom 16:25).

To understand the divine plan for humanity, we hear the brief portion of the creation narrative that describes God's work as a potter forming the first human being (the meaning of *Adam*) from the earth (*adamah*). The temptation and sin of the first couple seems simple, but to treat it as a child's story

would be unfortunate. As each person's conscience is awakened the individual enters situations where something wrong can be presented as beneficial. Evil can masquerade in every age so that it seems to offer life or foster its pleasures. May God open our eyes to see everything in the light of divine truth rather than through deceptive appearances!

The forty-day period of Lent offers us an opportunity to enter into union with Christ as we prepare to grapple with the mystery of life and the temptations that come our way. Just as Jesus experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit in a new way after his baptism by John, so we learn to appreciate the guidance of the Spirit in our life and mission. Prayer and fasting accompanied Christian baptism in the early Church (see Acts 9:19-19), so we strive to intensify our prayers by acts of discipline (such as fasting) in preparing to renew our baptismal commitment in the Easter Vigil.