

From the Desk of Fr. Jerry

March 9, 2025

Dear Friends,

In today's first reading, Moses is teaching the people to memorize a story from their past. He begins with the words "My Father was a wandering Aramean who went to Egypt..." Maybe this is a remote way of saying it, but it is a core message of the Hebrew scriptures. The descendants of Abraham made a journey from slavery to freedom and the manna in the desert is what fed them. The journey from slavery to freedom is being evoked, not as a past event, but as a present reality. It provides a context for our Lenten journey.

From the time of Moses until the time of Jesus, this story was told, but not as a thing of the past. It was told in a perpetual present tense. This slavery to freedom story was their story. It happened to them personally.

Jesus and the devil trade bible verses in the gospel. When Jesus responds to Satan "One does not live on bread alone," the journey from slavery to freedom and the manna in the desert are again being evoked, not as a past event, but as a present reality.

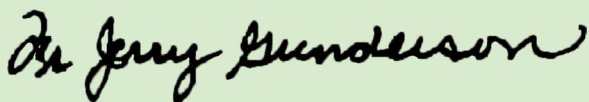
In Luke's temptation story, Jesus and the devil trade scripture verses. But only Jesus embodies what he says. The devil speaks the words, but Satan neither believes nor commits to them. Jesus, however, is the Word he speaks and there is no gap between the divine story and his story. How committed to the Word are we?

Amid many voices shouting for and many against, how does one hear God's word? Where is it found? And how does it feed us? How is the old story being told anew in the present moment? St. Paul says, "That word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart," but how do we find it?

All the stories we listen to at Mass during this Lenten season are meant to have this sense of immediacy for us. The journey of God's people from slavery to freedom is our story. But the truth is that we often don't sense their immediacy. It is the devil's work, we might say, to tempt us to regard God's word as a dead word, a mere pawn in the game of religion, a pious platitude to be mouthed for the benefit of children.

And by nature, we humans prefer visual over audio forms of communication. We favor scriptures that can be rendered visually (as in a movie). We don't just listen to music; we watch music being made. But faith doesn't depend on seeing. Faith comes first through hearing. So maybe it is our hearing the old story as a present reality for our lives that is at the heart of Lent. Hearing the old story as new will evoke the deepest level of our faith.

So, one way we could approach the Lenten season is with a renewed commitment to hearing the word of God as a fresh and living word being spoken today for our benefit. We could dedicate ourselves to closing the gap between that "old story" and the one we are living each moment so intimately. We might start with the Sunday readings or the readings each day for a Lenten Mass. There is a sense in which these texts can carry us through this Lenten season to the renewal of our Baptism at Easter.



Fr. Jerry Gunderson