

Genesis 2:15-17,3:1-7

Matthew 4:1-11

Romans 5:12-19

“Be glad in the Lord and rejoice.
Seekers of justice shout for joy,
all you upright in heart.” AMEN!

(Sing)

“Shout, Shout. Let it all out.
These are the things I can do without.
Come on, I’m talking to you, come on!”

This song was Tears for Fears’ first song
that went to number 1 on Billboard Hot 100 in 1984.

It’s not about sending out
primal screams into
the atmosphere.

Though that’s healthy to do! :-)

This song is about political protest.

The next verse reads:

“In violent times you
shouldn’t have to sell your soul
In black and white,
they really, really ought to know
Those one track minds
that took you for a working boy
kiss them goodbye

you shouldn't have to jump for joy
you shouldn't have to jump for joy.”

Wow!

The context of the song reveals one
shouldn't have to pretend excitement or
act like they're grateful in order to please
people who are exploiting them.

What meaning these lyrics bring out
when we consider the temptations that
Jesus experienced in the wilderness.

The tempter (devil) wanted to exploit Jesus
and challenged him to feed himself
after his long period of fasting.

Then the devil took Jesus to the pinnacle of
the temple and tempted him to
prove God's protection.

Then, a third time, the devil tempted Jesus
with power to control the kingdoms of the world.

As the song said, in violent times,
you shouldn't have to sell your soul. (Pause)

They were violent times then and
they are violent times now.

How many in our day are tempted by food,
respect, and control?

This is not about giving up
chocolate cake for Lent or
starting a journal.

Though both are good practices. :-)

This message from Matthew's gospel today
is about what Jesus' relationship with power
looks like.

While it is true that Jesus fed multitudes,
gained respect among those who paid attention
to what he said and did, and

finally exhibited control over
the powers of life and death.

He was unwilling to exploit his power to prove anything.

There's another reason why Jesus
rejected the devil's invitations.

The answer may seem obvious,
but must be said out loud.

If Jesus was to succumb to the devil's bidding,
he would have become an agent of the devil.

Even more harsh, he'd have become
the son of the devil and thus
betray his true identity. (Pause)

Even though Jesus will utilize and display
miraculous deeds of power,
his true identity involves suffering and death.

And for that reason, he's the agent of
God's power because he won't use
his power to exploit God and save himself.
(Pause)

We might ask ourselves, what sort of wilderness
are we in today?

Illness (either mental or physical),
loneliness, social media,
despair, hopelessness?

These wildernesses expose us to
succumb to the devil's temptations.

We want to save ourselves and might
consider selling our soul in order to do it. (Pause)

Maybe that's why our nation is in the place it's in.

Political figures that were respected 15 years ago,
even if you didn't agree with a particular policy,

the person could explain their logic, have gone
the way of temptation.

Today, we have slipped into chaos
because those same political figures
have attached themselves to a person
who uses power for their own gain and
has no respect for boundaries
for the responsibilities of
leadership.

Many leaders have sold their souls for power
and have chosen to satisfy base desires. (Pause)

There's a great example of what's happening
today in Dostoevsky's novel
The Brothers Karamazov.

The Grand Inquisitor argues that Jesus
should have accepted the devil's offers
in the wilderness.

His reason was so that people could
have material security and clear authority.

They satisfy base desires where
freedom causes anxiety and
leads us to our own devices.

We want bread, certainty, and someone to obey
even when it's apparent,

with our own eyes and ears,
that the person is entirely wrong.

Jesus chose a path that demands inner faith
and moral freedom rather than external control.

Just watching a few minutes of clips
regarding a prominent person in government
before a council supports the truth. (Pause)

I believe, however, that God is not finished with us.

In the same way that God was not finished
with Adam and Eve after being exiled
from the Garden of Eden.

In our reading today, we find a story about
the ways humans respond (typically) when
we are given boundaries.

It was God's first rule/law.

You can have eat from any tree in the garden
except for this one.

Eden, the garden of delight, abundance, fullness,
and plenty should have been enough for us,
but when it comes to the lure of
"being like God," it's too tempting.

Now, the boundaries between
good and evil become blurred.

And if we're not careful we'll lean
to being "like God" every time. (Pause)

The imagery and lessons is useful, and critical for us
to soak in today on
this First Sunday in Lent.

God's reign, God's empire
is present and growing stronger each day.

You, by being here and hearing this message
give the world hope, one person at a time.

We honor the boundaries that guide us for
living with justice and peace.

We respect the divide between human beings and God,
as God's presence leads us to jump for joy!

AMEN!