

First Sunday of Lent C Moving Rocks
Fr. Frank Schuster

What I find striking about the story of Jesus' temptation in the desert is that, at first glance, the devil's suggestions seem reasonable. Why shouldn't Jesus give himself some bread if he was hungry? Why shouldn't Jesus accept the invitation to have dominion over all the kingdoms of the world? Why shouldn't Jesus use all the power at his disposal to satisfy every whim he may have? This is particularly on my mind because this has been a tough week for many of us. We had a funeral yesterday for a beloved parishioner who sang in our 9 AM choir who succumbed rapidly to cancer that he didn't know he had until it was too late. John was a good, generous and loving soul. We will miss him. On Ash Wednesday we learned that a member of our Lifeteen choir, Susann, had been robbed from us in a most terrible way. Susann was very joyful and kind, a very good friend to those who knew her. We will miss her terribly as well. I will be working with her family this coming week concerning funeral arrangements. And, of course, if that wasn't enough, the Pope decided to retire. This was a demonstration of profound holiness and humility on his part, however, even the Universal Church finds herself beginning Lent in a mournful way. Why shouldn't Jesus have some bread if he was hungry? Why shouldn't Jesus accept the invitation to have dominion over all the kingdoms of the world? Why shouldn't Jesus use the power at his disposal to satisfy every whim he may have? I believe there is a powerful spiritual lesson in today's Gospel that Jesus is passing onto us. I found a story that I think helps articulate what is going on. The story is called...

I Will Move the Rock
by Cindy Lu

It begins...

A man was sleeping at night in his cabin when suddenly his room filled with light and the Savior appeared. The Lord told the man he had work for him to do and showed him a large rock in front of his cabin. The Lord explained that the man was to push against the rock with all his might.

This the man did, day after day. For many years he toiled from sun up to sun down, his shoulders set squarely against the cold, massive surface of the unmoving rock, pushing with all his might. Each night the man returned to his cabin sore and worn out, feeling that his whole day had been spent in vain.

Seeing that the man was showing signs of discouragement, Satan decided to enter the picture by placing thoughts into the man's mind such as: "You have been pushing against that rock for a long time, and it hasn't budged. Why kill yourself over this? You are never going to move it."

Thus giving the man the impression that the task was impossible and that he was a failure, these thoughts discouraged and disheartened the man even more. "Why kill myself over this?" he thought. "I'll just put in my time, giving just the minimum effort, and that will be good enough."

And that he planned to do until one day he decided to make it a matter of prayer and take his troubled thoughts to the Lord. "Lord," he said, "I have labored long and hard in your service, putting all my strength to do that which you have asked. Yet, after all this time, I have not even budged that rock by half a millimeter. What is wrong? Why am I failing?"

To this the Lord responded compassionately, "My friend, when I asked you to serve me and you accepted, I told you that your task was to push against the rock with all your strength, which you have done. Never once did I mention to you that I expected you to move it. Your task was to push. And now you come to me, with your strength spent, thinking that you have failed. But, is that really so? Look at yourself.

Your arms are strong and muscled, your back sinewed and brown, your hands are callused from constant pressure, and your legs have become massive and hard. Through opposition you have grown much and your abilities now surpass that which you used to have. Yet you haven't moved the rock. But your calling was to be obedient and to push and to exercise your faith and trust in My wisdom. This you have done.

"And now, my friend, I the Lord will now move the rock."

The moral of the story is, by all means, Lent is the time to exercise the faith that moves mountains, but it is still God who moves the mountains.

It is very fitting that on the first Sunday of Lent we are invited to join Jesus on a pilgrimage into the desert for forty days and forty nights. We are invited to join Jesus by fasting a little bit, giving up a little self pleasure from time to time, and doing little things that emphasize we are to think of others before ourselves. Lent gives us a powerful invitation to find one thing in our lives we can do to exercise the spiritual part of our lives through fasting and prayer before the season of Easter begins. Whatever you decide to do, Lent is an invitation to exercise the spiritual part of our lives with the faith that we can't live on bread alone. There is a spiritual side to us that needs caring for as well.

And so, we ask ourselves, what is the immovable rock that you and I are facing right now in our lives? This rock could be a vice, however, many times it is something more formidable, like the grief we carry from the loss of a loved one, or perhaps a deep wound that we carry, a deep hurt in our soul that won't heal, or perhaps a disappointment that we can't seem to shake. What is that immovable rock that meets us as we enter into the season of Lent? My friends, may these forty days in the desert with Jesus prepare us for the abundant graces we will receive at Easter, when the great stone is rolled away from the tomb in proclamation of the resurrection. We can't move that rock. Only God can move that stone. May God, who trains our hearts and souls in this holy season, help us move whatever rock that blocks our way to entering more fully into the perfect joy God desires for us through Christ our Lord, Amen.