

## **Sermon for 21 February 2010 – Lent 1 C – St Francis**

What an interesting week it is in which we enter Lent. Much of our media is focused on athletics and spectacular performances. Clearly, some parallels may be drawn between the dedication, self-denial, and daily routines an Olympic athlete engages in for years to prepare and Jesus' intentional time of fasting and prayer to prepare for earthly ministry. To truly prepare for that which challenges us to the core of our being we must be intentional. Still as prepared as anyone may believe he or she is, there are challenges that can come upon us unexpectedly. There are temptations that can draw us away from the core we believed we held.

This week we also heard a sports icon confess that he had fallen prey to the belief that he was special. Once he accepted this belief as fact he began to also believe that the rules of life and the behaviors of an honorable person no longer applied to him. His hard fall both publically and privately have shown him how wrong he was. And the belief that he is special is just the temptation with which the devil tries to lure Jesus in our reading today. The devil invites Jesus first to prove he is miraculous by turning stones into bread. Next to show he is powerful by ruling all the kingdoms of the world. And finally to prove he is spectacular by throwing himself from the height of the temple and to have the angels catch him as our Psalm today promised they would. No, no, and no again Jesus responds to these lures. To be anything other than truly human as he lives as one of us would negate his coming among us to share our lives, our challenges, and our hardships. Jesus' humanity is what we can cling to when we are faced with our own challenges.

The image of 40 days in the wilderness takes on new meaning today as we mark 40 days since the devastating earthquake hit Haiti on January 12. Stories of hardships and struggles to endure continue to pour out of Haiti. At the same time we have also received this Lenten meditation for the First Sunday in Lent – Episcopal Relief & Development Sunday from the Bishop of Haiti, Bishop Duracin, whose birthday was yesterday. He writes: “January 12 was a terrible day for the Haitian people. The earthquake left not a soul untouched. There is not a single family that did not lose a close friend or member: mothers, fathers, siblings, in some cases entire families disappeared. As for resources, we have next to nothing. The wreckage is beyond imagination. However, this situation delivers us into faith. I look at this as a baptism. We who are still alive have had the blessing of survival, but in many ways we have died to the ways of the past. We have the opportunity to rise up and start anew. In this moment of grief and mourning, life must continue. During this Lenten season, it is important for us in Haiti to turn

inward and rediscover all that is just within us. It is imperative that we be reborn in this moment. We will live without the physical trappings of the church because we still have the same spiritual guidance, the confessions, the conversations, the reflections. We need faith. We must go forward with confidence and hope. The Haitian people are fighters. We will not give up. We must see within this situation the possibilities that exist. Jealousy, anger, hatred – this is not the time for these. We turn to Jesus Christ, who did not fall into temptation; though he was in hard situations, he overcame death in victory.....we Haitians are speaking to each other in new ways. We can look at each other with new eyes. We can create a society of respect and love so that we may truly live as children of God. This is how we can rebuild our country. We have also seen how other people – other nations – love us. The people of this Episcopal Church have sent countless messages witnessing sympathy. Knowing we are not alone gives us confidence in new life. My wife was injured in the earthquake and left to seek medical care. I cannot visit her. I miss her and wish she were here with me. It is natural to question, but we hold on in faith to God – God who is always good, the God of infinite compassion. That we were struck by this tragedy does not mean God is not with us. God is here. We must always remember that God lives in this world. There is pain, but there is also joy. God gives us assurance not of the life that ends, but the life that is eternal. The earthquake did not diminish our worship, though it altered the places where it takes place. The church has not faltered and must now rise to a new role....familiarity of religious practices sustains us. We give glory to God. We sing within the church of the world. We celebrate life with the same spirit we were given it. In the middle of all the deaths, there is a God of love and of life, and we must shout Alleluia with the living.”

As we listen to this witness I believe we have much to learn from our Haitian brothers and sisters in Christ. Our prayers and our help are still needed and cherished by our Haitian neighbors. So, as we begin Lent we are invited to spend time each day meditating on how much we have been given and what we can give in turn out of our “first fruits of harvest” as our Lord God instructed in our reading from Deuteronomy. Let us look with the eyes of faith as our brothers and sisters in Haiti now see. Let us listen in love to all of our neighbors, both in Haiti and in the world, calls for support, let us embrace the understanding that God is always with us and live as though each and every one of us has that certain knowledge.