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Pastor, St. Michael the Archangel

Fourth Sunday of Lent – Year A (March 22, 2020)

During this season of Lent, I have been focusing my homilies on catechesis taken from one of Archbishop Fulton Sheen's more famous books, *The Life of Christ* (1954). One of the recurring themes in this book is the mission of Christ, not so much as a wonder worker, not so much as a social worker, not so much as a teacher like so many other religious figures; but as "The Savior of the World." He did these other things for sure, and even instructs his disciples to act accordingly. But the most pressing reason he came into the world was to bring redemption and unite the human race to the Father by the sacrifice that he would make on Calvary.

For instance, the Gospel of the First Sunday of Lent in Year A is from the Gospel of Matthew (4:1-11) which relates Jesus' 40 days in the desert, ending in three temptations from the devil. These temptations, Archbishop Sheen says in the chapter called "Three Short Cuts from the Cross," come as a devilish "appeal to Our Lord to disregard His Divine Mission and His Messianic work." Or, as he puts it in another way "All three temptations sought to woo Our Lord from His Cross and, therefore, from Redemption." By tempting the Lord to turn stones into bread, what the devil was trying to get Jesus to do was "to be a baker, instead of a Redeemer." The second temptation was for Jesus to cast Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple and display his power as the Son of God through pride and egoism and, therefore, "forget the Cross and replace it with an effortless display of power, which would make it easy for everyone to believe in Him." The third temptation came from the devil by "[O]ffering Our Lord the world on one condition: that He worship Satan."

"Worship, of course, would imply service. The service would be this: that inasmuch as the kingdom of the world was under the power of sin, the new Kingdom which Our Lord would establish must be only a continuation of the old on. In short, He could have the earth, provided He promised not to change it. He would have mankind, as long as he promised not to redeem it."

One by one, Our Lord refuses to give in and moves closer to His Cross and not away from it.

The Third Sunday of Lent in Year A is from the Gospel of John (4: 5-42) and tells of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan Woman at the well. In the unfolding of this meeting, Archbishop Sheen notes in the chapter called "Savior of the World" that "No physical miracle was performed; no healing, nor opening of blind eyes. The wonder wrought was in a sinful soul." This woman, rejected even by her own people, came to understand and believe who Jesus truly was. "She came," says Archbishop Sheen, "to draw water, and when she found the True Well, she left behind her waterpot, as the Apostles had abandoned their nets." What she does next is the call of every disciple: to go and spread the Good News. And this she did with great fervor. Upon hearing her testimony many in her town went to seek Him out and invited the Lord to stay with them. They then gave their own testimony of belief saying to the woman, "We no longer believe because of your word; for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the savior of the world." As Archbishop Sheen notes, "this was the first time the phrase 'Savior of the world' was used to describe Our Lord."

This Fourth Sunday of Lent in Year A, the Gospel is taken again from John (9:1-41) about Jesus giving sight to a man born blind, which he does on a Sabbath. This creates a dispute between the leading Pharisees*, who were teachers, against Jesus. They began their investigation, but, as Archbishop Sheen points out in the chapter entitled “The Good Shepherd,” “They made up their minds that no amount of evidence would ever change their opinion, for they had now ‘come to an agreement that anyone who acknowledged Jesus as the Christ should be forbidden [in] the synagogue.’” And this they did to the man born blind. He was thrown out. We are told that when Jesus heard of it, that he sought the man out, like a shepherd seeking out the lost lamb. When he found him, we are told, Jesus said to him: “‘Do you believe in the Son of Man?’ He answered and said, ‘Who is he, sir that I may believe in him?’ Jesus said to him, ‘You have seen him, the one speaking with you is he.’ He said, ‘I do believe, Lord’ and he worshipped him.” (John 9:36).

This conversion through the encounter that the man born blind had with Jesus is the real point of the story. His openness to the truth of Christ vs. the closed mindedness of some the Pharisees challenges us even today to ask ourselves if we truly do believe that Jesus is “*The Savior of the World*,” of *our* own world, of our very *lives*. And if we answer yes, as did the Samaritan woman and the man born blind, then what are we willing to do with our lives to spread the Good News? If we are not challenged by this, then are we like the Pharisees who refuse to see, or are we waiting for God to still prove himself to us?

“The miracle of giving sight to the man born blind” Archbishop Sheen says, “was like all of his miracles—they pointed to His work of giving His life as a ransom for mankind. Every moment of His life had the Cross in it; His teaching had value because of the Cross. His active exposure to the Cross for the sake of love was quite different from a stoic acceptance of it when it came. But he entered voluntarily the gate of Calvary for the sake of righteousness.” Will we follow him, or will we look for the easy way out?

*It is important to note the Churches teaching on the proper understand of the relationship to the Jewish people and the Church. The following statement comes from the Vatican II Declaration, *Nostra Aetate (Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christians*, 28 October, 1965). Here it states that “neither all Jews indiscriminately at that time, nor Jews today, can be charged with the crimes committed during His [Jesus’] passion.... The Jews should not be spoken of as rejected or accursed....” (#4).