

Title: What's On Your Lips?

Today is the first Sunday in lent, forty days of preparation for Easter; forty days that the church has set aside as a time for the discipline of prayer to prepare for Easter. In the old days Christians would fast from food during lent except on Sundays, the day of resurrection so that Easter morning would be a great celebration. Forty days of fasting! I couldn't even imagine, after a 30 hour famine, I couldn't wait to bite into a juicy steak! Today, many Christians instead of fasting from food select a treat or a leisure activity to give up for the forty days. People give up coffee, or chocolate or personal use of their cell phone. Some people give up watching sports or eating snack foods. One year in sixth grade I tried to give up video games for lent.

But you know what I noticed? I got crankier and crankier the closer Easter came. At first I replaced reading books and playing with my legos with the time I would have spent on the nintendo. I got bored of that and switched to riding my bike. But after what seemed like a month, (really it was just one week), I couldn't stand it any more. The words on my lips were complaints and whines that I couldn't wait, I needed to play nintendo now. "Besides," I said, "God won't care, He wants me to be happy." Eventually I wore my parents down and I gave up candy instead (but I didn't even really like candy or get offered it much anyway). For the rest of lent I felt like I short changed God. I felt like I was far away from God. Easter morning did not feel special that year.

This happens to adults too, but usually we just figure a way around what we gave up. Instead of sports on TV, we read about them in the paper. Instead of using our cell phone, we go out to lunch with our friends more often. In place of coffee, we drink coke or pepsi. We rationalize that, "If God really loves me, he'll understand." We only give God lip service. Folks, this is a problem. I feel we've taken the form of the past, but not the essence. We try to do the right thing, but we miss the point. Thankfully whenever we have a problem, scripture has a solution – and usually one with a concrete example to follow. Our gospel lesson for today (Luke 4:1-13) tells us about forty days that Christ spent fasting. He too was tempted by things he had given up.

When Jesus was good and hungry, the devil asked him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.” Jesus was the Son of God, and had the ability to do as the devil asked, but Christ had been directed to give up food to be closer to God.

Then devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." The devil wasn't lying, but Christ wasn't buying. Jesus had given all his loyalty to the father. Jesus, coming to earth in the form of a human, became a servant, giving up his own plans for the master plan of the Father.

Next, the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" Christ had given all his love to the Father and would not put God's love to the test.

We have to realize that these three temptations were the devil's attempts to separate Jesus from the love of God. Putting God to the test offends God. This is true even in ordinary human relationships, to put your significant other's love to the test in itself is an act of betrayal. Now, although each of these temptations were especially piercing for Jesus, because he was indeed the Son of God, we are similarly tempted by the idea of putting God to the test.

I think we put God to the test every time we have on our lips phrases like: “God won't care, He wants me to be happy,” or “If God really loves me, he'll understand.” We are separated from God when we make decisions that put us in control of our lives, decisions where we end up relying on our own power and resources. This is sin – ugly and smelly, and dark.

But Glory Hallelujah, there's a way to be cleaned. There's a way to remain close to God and to return to God when you have been separated. The key is in our gospel story, just under the surface. Both at the beginning and end of the story, the bible mentions that Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit. That was his only protection, and is who we should look for strength and guidance. Jesus was using the power of the Spirit when he was

quoting scripture. In answer to each of the devil's temptations, the Spirit prompted Christ to have these phrases on his lips:

"It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'"

"It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'"

"It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

God really does care what words are upon our lips. In Deuteronomy 26:1-11 – The Israelites were instructed that after entering the promised land they were to bring their first fruits before the Lord and have a response on their lips, explaining the story of God's blessing Abraham's obedience, and God's mighty deliverance from their captivity and guidance to the bounty of the promised land. Because thanksgiving was on their lips, God blessed them with bounty.

In the 91st Psalm, those who call God, "My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust" will be protected, they will be heard when they cry out, they will be rescued and honored. God will satisfy them with long life and show them salvation.

Romans 10:8-13 further teaches that "if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." The greatest reward is due those whose lips confess and heart believes. For whatever is on your lips reveals what is in your heart.

This lent, I am challenging myself and each of you to watch what is on our lips. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide us to greater dependence on God, to give Jesus deeper lordship over more aspects of our lives; and to help us seek ways to remove from our lips complaints, and whining, and tests of God's love. Request the Counselor to replace these sinful, ugly, smelly, dark attitudes with clean, pure, life giving, beautiful attitudes of surrender to God.

Now let us go and celebrate the great provision God has made for us through Christ and his Holy Spirit by kneeling in our pews or coming to the altar to dedicate ourselves to prayer this lent in preparation for Easter.