

Charly Lochowitzer offers a story from Africa, that tells of a teacher who found on the teacher's desk, a gift from one of the students. The gift was a beautiful and expensive seashell. The teacher knew that the student could not easily afford such a gift. He also found that such a shell could only be found on a beach of a *secluded bay* many miles away. The teacher was most thankful for the gift, and asked the student, "You walked many miles to get this shell, didn't you?" The student nodded, smiled and replied: "The walk is part of the gift".

We have started the 40-day Lenten journey. This Holy season of Lent is a time of preparation; *a desert time*: (Jesus, Moses, Israelites)

This journey of lent will lead us to the foot of the cross of good Friday, leading us to the Easter glory. Whatever we do in the area of prayer, fasting and almsgiving, the effort is part of 'our offering, our gift to God'.

On this first Sunday of Lent, we have a passage from the very beginning of the Bible, the story of first sin, the fall of Adam and Eve. We know that the first sin of Adam and Eve was of disobedience. But we also know that the first temptation consisted in the suggestion: "you will be like gods".

Is this not the same temptation that has always plagued humanity? Like gods, we are tempted to be in control. We want to decide, what is right and wrong. We love power, honor and glory that pertains to almighty.

Today's gospel will tell us that this is the same temptation that Jesus conquered in his battle with Satan in the desert. The devil tries to tempt Jesus to topple down his Father's plan. Through the power of the word of God, Jesus was able to chase devil away, because he was fully focused on his Fathers' plan for him, his mission.

Pope Francis, in his Lenten message this year stated: "we need to set out on our Lenten journey, like a mountain trek, an uphill path, that requires effort, sacrifice and focus. During any strenuous mountain trek, we must keep our eyes firmly fixed on the path".

During lent, we may make heroic efforts out of love. In our relationship with Jesus, we are invited to do more than bare minimum. We make sacrifices and efforts out of love and by his example. What we need to keep in mind is that our Lenten journey is not a solitary hike. It is a group effort as a parish community and as a whole church.

There are numerous opportunities during lent to grow in holiness and become more disciplined in living out and giving witness to the gospel in our daily lives. Lent is not an automatic withdrawal with little or no effort from our part. Above all, it is the desire for a deeper understanding of what it means to be a baptized Christian, a member of the church.

It takes effort to plan our daily activities in the context of Lent. It takes conscious effort to give up a favorite food or drink, or choosing purposefully a monetary contribution to provide resources for those most in need. It needs sacrifice and conscious effort to fight a bad habit. It needs greater effort to give a call, or start a dialogue with your partner or friend, family member, someone close to you in a broken relationship.

B&S., ask the Holy spirit to help you recognize where you are being tempted, to distance from God. It may be something subtle, like continuing in a bad habit. Or it may be obvious, like resisting God's will in difficult situations of your life. It may be self-destructive like perpetuating unforgiveness for a hurt or insult received.

Today, let us focus on God' faithfulness, believing that he will provide for you as you follow his ways in lent, trusting in him. Let's rely on the Lord and watch for his grace and blessing. That grace can help you overcome any temptations, including the temptations to be your own god. This Lent, just keep asking God's grace, and trust that it will never run out. Amen.