

Lent: A Downward Decent to Humility; Christ's Temptation a Call to Humility!!!
Matthew 4:1-11

Manfred, Freiherr von Richthofen, the famous German First World War fighter pilot was better known as the Red Baron -because he flew a distinctive a red Fokker aircraft.

He shot down more enemy combat planes than anyone else on either side and his known kill tally was 80.

On 21st April 1918, he began chasing a Canadian plane that was trying to escape the battle over the Mor-lan-court Ridge, near the river Somme.

As the Red Baron pursued his prey behind Allied lines, he didn't watch out.

He dived too low into the enemy lines and he also missed a Canadian pilot (Arthur) "Roy" Brown coming up on his tail to help his comrade.

Whether it was a shot from the ground - or a shot from Brown that killed Richthofen, we will never know.

But what we do know is that the end of the "Red Baron" came because he made the mistake of pursuing that Allied 'plane "too long, too far, and too low into enemy territory" (as one report so succinctly put it)

And chasing temptation for too long, too far, and too low into enemy territory has caused the downfall of many good people.

And as with Richthofen – they are then caught unawares with the consequences.

Sin takes us

- further than we ever wanted to go,
- costs more than we were ever willing to pay, &
- hurts more than we ever dreamed it would.

And it all starts with how we handle the temptations that we face.

As I prepared for today's service, I was very aware that in the Christian Calendar we have begun our journey into the season of Lent. Beginning on Ash Wednesday, Lent is a season of reflection and preparation before the celebrations of Easter. By observing the 40 days of Lent, Christians replicate Jesus Christ's sacrifice and withdrawal into the desert for 40 days. Lent is marked by fasting, both from food and festivities.

Wikipedia states: "The purpose of Lent is the preparation of the believer for Easter through prayer, doing penance, mortifying the flesh, repentance of sins, almsgiving, and denial of ego."

In the book, Christianity for Dummies, it argues: "On the Christian calendar, Lent is the 40-day period from Ash Wednesday to Easter. When it was first observed in the fourth century, its focus was on self-examination and self-denial in preparation for Easter, and Christians used fasting (abstaining from eating food) in the early years as a visible demonstration of this process.

According to the Catholic Encyclopedia, "the real aim of Lent is, above all else, to prepare men for the celebration of the death and Resurrection of Christ...the better the preparation the more effective the celebration will be. One can effectively relive the mystery only with purified mind and heart. The purpose of Lent is to provide that purification by weaning men from sin and selfishness through self-denial and prayer, by creating in them the desire to do God's will and to make His kingdom come by making it come first of all in their hearts."

One of the commentators I read about Lent was very critical about this season, because they felt that it was very unbiblical and had no place in the Christian Calendar. It is true that the word, Lent is not found in the Bible, and that Jesus and His disciples did not practice Lent. Nonetheless, the season of Lent is based on the biblical passage of Matthew 4:1-11 that describes that Jesus Christ withdrew Himself into the

wilderness for 40 days and nights – where He was tempted by the devil. I have the following description for Lent. ... **LENT: A DOWNWARD DECENT TO HUMILITY; CHRIST'S TEMPTATION A CALL TO HUMILITY!!!**

On the Webpage, Got Questions, it observes: "If a Christian wishes to observe Lent, he is free to do so. The key is to focus on repenting of sin and consecrating oneself to God. Lent should not be a time of boasting of one's sacrifice or trying to earn God's favor or increasing His love. God's love for us could not be any greater than it already is."

Consequently, if a Christian chooses to observe Lent, it should be out of a heart that yearns to truly appreciate the abundant grace of Christ's saving work on the cross. By reminding us of our need and willfully submitting to Christ's authority, a Lenten observer prepares their heart to celebrate Easter with a renewed sense of joy and amazement. It is not six weeks of self-discipline to impress others or to impress God. Rather, it is a time of humbling oneself before God in a demonstration of dependence and thanksgiving.

Indeed, Christ's wilderness experience prepared the Lord Jesus to be our sympathetic High Priest, for He was tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin. For us, and on behalf of all who are in Christ Jesus, He overcame the Devil and all His wicked ways. The Lord Jesus has broken the power of Satan, sin and death in our lives, and because we belong to Jesus, the power of His life-giving Spirit has freed us from the power of Satan - thanks be to God, Who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Indeed, the areas in which Jesus Christ was tempted, are areas that we are tempted every day in our Christian walk. Jesus' temptations follow three patterns that are common to all men. The first temptation concerns the lust of the flesh (Matthew 4:3-4). Our Lord is hungry, and the devil tempts Him to convert stones into bread, but He replies with Scripture, quoting Deuteronomy 8:3. The second temptation concerns the pride of life (Matthew 4:5-7), and here the devil uses a verse of Scripture (Psalm 91:11-12), but the Lord replies again with Scripture to the contrary (Deuteronomy 6:16), stating that it is wrong for Him to abuse His own powers. The third temptation concerns the lust of the eyes (Matthew 4:8-10), and if any quick route to the Messiahship could be attained, bypassing the passion and crucifixion for which He had originally come, this was the way. The devil already had control over the kingdoms of the world (Ephesians 2:2) but was now ready to give everything to Christ in return for His allegiance. But the mere thought almost causes the Lord's divine nature to shudder at such a concept and He replies sharply, "You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only" (Deuteronomy 6:13).

Finally, somewhere in the history of organized sports, a coaching staff tried out a new theory. These coaches reasoned that taking their teams away the night before a big game and putting the athletes up in a hotel gave them a competitive advantage. They felt that this cloistering would remove the athletes from the distractions of everyday life and allow the team to focus more thoroughly on the game ahead. For decades, this has been a common practice among both college and professional teams.

Jesus knew the value of concentrating on the task at hand, and He prepared for His contest with Satan as no person has ever prepared before or since. Forty days alone in the desert not only removed Jesus from every human contact or since. Forty days alone in the desert not only removed Jesus from every human contact that would demand His attention; by fasting, Jesus even said "no" to normal human needs in order to prepare Himself for the devil's looming temptations.

An unknown author argues: "The temptation of our Lord allows us a glimpse at a level of spiritual warfare we would otherwise know nothing about. The Bible says that Jesus was tempted in the same ways we are tempted (Heb. 4:15), but we will never experience the intensity of the trial Jesus faced." (Today in the Word, November 3, 1997.)

Therefore, in conclusion, ... **LENT: A DOWNWARD DECENT TO HUMILITY; CHRIST'S TEMPTATION A CALL TO HUMILITY!!!** ... Consequently, in this time of Lent, humble yourself by sharpening your competitive advantage in the spiritual war for your soul that Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour has won on the Cross of Calvary for you and me!

Amen.

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1st March 2020