*That they may have life*by Bishop Chad W. Zielinski

*Increase our fascination with God this Lent*

Every year we enter into Lent, we recall the 40 days Jesus spent in the desert fasting and praying. So, too, the entire Church is united more closely in one heart and mind during this time of prayer and penance.

In the Gospel reading for the First Sunday of Lent, *Matthew 4:1-11*, we hear, “At that time Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil.” We were always taught as kids to stay far away from the devil and to say “no” to evil and temptation. I always found this rather interesting that the Spirit led Jesus to face the devil.

As we hear in scripture, Jesus faces the three temptations from the devil. He confronts them with a relationship of persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amidst temptation, Jesus is faithful to all the Father has called him to do. We hear in *John 6:37-39*, “Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and I will not reject anyone who comes to me, because I came down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of the one who sent me. And this is the will of the one who sent me, that I should not lose anything of what he gave me, but that I should raise it [on] the last day.” Jesus confronts the devil and temptation on our behalf so that we can be saved. We are saved through a relationship with him that happens at our baptism. Our souls are forever imprinted with sacramental grace; we are sealed with the chrism oil to remind us that we are united to the Most Holy Trinity in a living and loving relationship.

During our Lenten journey, we are asked to focus more intensely on this relationship with Jesus and invited to draw closer to him by turning away from sin. We begin our Lenten journey on Ash Wednesday and hear the words, “Repent and believe in the Gospel,” as we are signed with ashes on our forehead. This is a choice on our part to turn more intimately toward Christ. Jesus guides and embraces us in this movement.

Last month, Feb. 14-15, the clergy of the Diocese of New Ulm gathered at the Church of St. Mary in Willmar for our bi-annual Clergy Days. The presenter was Fr. Vincent Lampert from the Archdiocese of Indianapolis. Fr. Lampert is a publicly known exorcist and has written a book, “Exorcism: The Battle Against Satan and His Demons,” to explain the ordinary and extraordinary activities of the devil, angels, and his ministry as an exorcist.

The thrust of Fr. Vince’s ministry is to help people encounter the healing power of God’s grace primarily through the sacraments of the Church. He explains that the two most powerful weapons against the devil are regular confession and regular Mass attendance. In confession, we are taking ownership of our sin and placing it in the merciful hands of Christ. The devil detests this because, as the great Accuser, he wants us to believe we cannot be forgiven. He wants us to persist in our sinful behavior. In receiving the Holy Eucharist, we are consuming the perfection of love and grace, the Real Presence of Christ, so we can be consumed by Christ to become him in the world – to be Christ to a brother or sister in need. In this movement, we crowd out the devil with love.

Fr. Vince boldly stated that we live in a world that is disinterested in faith, and that we either have a relationship with God or with something else. He pointed out the entry points where we can allow evil to intrude in our lives including palm reading, various forms of witchcraft, tarot cards, fortunetellers, use of Ouija boards to talk to spirits, and curiosity about ghosts. These things bombard us on television and the internet and lead to a fascination with evil. As people are deceived into this, it weakens one’s faith.

Exorcism is simply a healing ministry that focuses on a fascination with God, rather than on the devil. Fr. Vince’s advice is to fear God, not the devil, and to recognize the Church as a loving mother and source of help and hope.

Let’s make this our Lenten goal and increase our fascination with God by repenting and turning toward him who calls our name from the moment of conception.

Consider more “silence” so you can hear Christ speak to you more clearly. Slow down and turn away from temptation and distractions. Move to that quiet place to be with Christ, and open the doors to your heart, mind, and soul to encounter him. Hand him your heart, recognizing where it needs to be healed and forgiven. Most of all, have hope!

Jesus never tires of extending his mercy to draw us closer to him. The evil one, the great Accuser, will convince us there is no hope - which is why he is also called the great Deceiver. The words of *Habakkuk 2:3* remind us to wait with hope, “For the vision is a witness for the appointed time, a testimony to the end; it will not disappoint. If it delays, wait for it, it will surely come; it will not be late.”

Let us keep one another in prayer as we increase our fascination with God during this Lenten season.