Homily by Rev. Bob Schramm, OSFS
First Sunday of Lent 2017

It's important to know that in Matthew's Gospel story, right before this story about Jesus being tempted in the desert, we're told that Jesus, after he's baptized, hears a voice that comes from the heavens that says: "This is my beloved Son. My favor rests on him."

No sooner does he hear that voice than he finds himself in the middle of a desert being tempted by the devil.

One of the commentators on today's readings has this thought: The Gospel is a metaphor for the spiritual life—all of our lives that is. We all spend a good deal of our lives "in the desert" struggling with our "demons."

So we're faced with these two aspects of life as this Lent begins.

• On the one hand, we are the beloved sons and daughters of God.
• On the other hand, we spend a lot of life in the proverbial desert struggling with our demons.

The folks who study our universe (cosmologists) tell us that the universe has no center. One implication of that is that wherever you are, that's the center.

I think there's something in all of us that knows that to be true. It's not some form conceit. It not just narcissism, although there is plenty of that around, too. That voice that speaks to Jesus says the same thing to each of us. "You are my beloved. My favor rests on you." Each of us is special, unique, gifted, favored.

BUT, it's not easy to keep that focus when it seems so much around us says just the opposite.
There is such a temptation to believe that you are not blessed, beloved, when you are confronted with the fact that you are one among six billion others who don’t look or seem so special after all. Sometimes it can all seem so empty, and ordinary and anonymous.

It seems to me the temptations, the demons Jesus faces in today’s Gospel are the ones we all face as we lumber through life's desert.

Here's an edited version of the today’s conversation between Jesus and the devil that may help bring it all little closer to home.
I got this from Rev. Ron Rolheiser:

Jesus has been in the desert for 40 days and is VERY hungry.
1. Tempter "If you believe that you are God's specially blessed creature, why is your life so empty?"

   Jesus: "I can be empty and still be God's blessed one!
   Being blessed and special is not dependent upon
   how full or empty my life is at any given moment!"

Devil takes Jesus to the highest place in the Temple.
2. Tempter: "If you are blessed, throw yourself down. God will catch you."
   Jesus: "I'll take the stairs, thanks, just like everybody else."
   We are God's blessed ones, even when we find ourselves
   riding the city buses.

Devil takes Jesus to a very high mountain.
3. Devil: "If you're God's blessed one, how come you're a big, fat nobody?
   Not famous, not known, anonymous."
   Jesus: "I can be a big nobody and still be God's blessed one.
   Blessedness doesn't depend upon fame, on being a household name!"
   I can't help think of the Academy Awards last Sunday.
   Those ordinary folks on a tour bus mixing with the celebrities.

The special gift of Lent (and really of every time we gather at the table) is that we are reminded in song, word, bread, wine
that we are God's special blessed daughters and sons
even when our lives seem empty, anonymous, lacking in special privileges
and oh so ordinary.

The words of St. Paul in today's second reading ring true:
"Those who receive the abundance of grace
and the free gift of holiness
exercise authority in life through Jesus Christ."

We come here with hungry hearts to be fed with the true Bread of Life.