

**First Sunday of Lent – Year B**  
**(Mar. 1, 2009)**

***Be Perfect As Your Heavenly Father Is Perfect***

A pretty tall order, wouldn't you say? Impossible for us poor humans to do. But, you know, if Jesus told us to do it, it may not be so impossible after all. It seems to me Jesus would not tell us to do something that he would not also give us the grace to accomplish. Already in the Old Testament God had said to the people, "Be holy for I, the Lord your God, am holy." And that's the only motivation, not because we will receive a great reward, not because God will love us more – but just because God is holy.

In a sense holiness is something we already possess. We already are holy. We read in the first chapter of the Book of Genesis how at the end of each day of creation God looked on what God had made and saw that it was good. And on the sixth day after God had created human beings God looked on them and saw that they were very good. Why? Because they were made in the image and likeness of God. So how could they not be holy? How could we not be holy?

So, you may ask, I don't have to do anything to be holy? In one sense, no, we don't have to do anything. Holiness is part of our nature. It's who we are, God's holy people, and we were that way from our mother's womb. But from another point of view we do have to do something. We have to accept God's gift. We are born holy. But like Adam and Eve in the garden we can do things that mar that holiness – and there's the rub. We even have the power to reject God's gift. That's what we call sin.

What is it that guarantees our holiness? First of all the grace of God. And we always have the grace of God just as we always have the love of God. When people asked Jesus what they must do to gain eternal life, his response was always "Love!" Love God above all and your neighbor as yourself. But then in John's gospel he says, "Love one another as I have loved you." As I have loved you! Jesus loved us to death, quite literally. He also said, "No one has greater love than to give their life for their friends." So in asking us to love one another as he has loved us he is asking us to be

willing to die for one another. Again we will say impossible? Once again however we must remember. For us humans without the grace of God, yes, it's impossible. But with the grace of God all things are possible.

So at the end of this first week of Lent, as we pray about our place in the Paschal mystery, the mystery of the dying and rising of Jesus, it seems to me the best way to do that, is simply to accept the gift that God has already given us, the gift of holiness, and to love one another as Jesus has loved us.