

## First Sunday of Lent, February 22, 2026

One of the greatest advantages we have is that the enemy has already shown his cards. You already know how the enemy operates. You know his strategy. You know his tactics. So, if we can just be aware of how he works and what he is doing we are very well equipped actually to resist those tactics. And we know what the enemy really seeks to do is to drive a wedge between God and us; not because he cares for us, or that he wants us. He knows how God loves us and if he can deprive God of our love and our friendship, he knows how much that would displease God and that is exactly what he wants to do.

He is always trying to drive a wedge. We see that from the beginning, right in the third chapter of Genesis that we heard a moment ago. The enemy is right there trying to drive a wedge between mankind and God. And the main way that he does this is to try to sow the seeds of distrust but also doubt about the nature of the relationship between God and man. This is the way the enemy works. If he can get man to distrust God and have a different kind of notion about the reality of that relationship, then we have got to close the door. It is no coincidence that Jesus' temptation in the desert, follows directly on the experience of Baptism in which we actually heard the voice of God the Father saying, "*You are my beloved Son. You are my Son with whom I am well pleased.*" And then the spirit drives Jesus out into the desert, and satan strikes right at the root of that relationship. "If you are the son of a God" - he wants to throw that into question and have doubts about the nature of the relationship between the Father and the Son. Ultimately, what the enemy wants to do is to make us think that we are orphans. And he wants us to act in this world as if we are orphans and that we know we don't have a Father in Heaven who is madly in love with us and provides

for all of our needs and forgives our sins when we repent. A God, a Father, who gives us grace for each day. No, the enemy wants us to think that we are orphans and that we can't trust in God to give us what we need.

Dr. Bob Schuttes, in his study of the Fathers of the Church and the seven deadly sins identified by so many of the Fathers of the Church, he came up with seven deadly 'wounds' that are connected to the seven deadly sins. He identifies those wounds as rejection, abandonment, powerlessness, confusion, fear, shame, and hopelessness. Now maybe you have experienced one or more or most, or all, of those wounds in human relationships. But I suspect we also experience these wounds in our relationship with God. How many times in our relationship with God have we imagined rejection? Or felt abandonment, or powerlessness, or confusion or fear or shame or hopelessness? If we have experienced these dynamics, we know the fruit of the enemy's work because those dynamics are not from God. God does not inflict those wounds. This is the enemy trying to convince us that we are orphans. We know that we confess in our faith that we are children of God, but if he can get us to act as if we are orphans and to operate in our minds as if we are orphans, then he will have stolen one of our most precious gifts. And that's what he wants to do.

These wounds seep into all areas of life and work into a mentality, work in all dimensions of life - marriages, parenting, work, social interactions, even our willingness to share our faith, to evangelize. If we can be in a place where we're not sure we can depend on God to provide what we need, how are we going to recommend to others that they enter into that? If, for all intents and purposes, we are orphans instead of children of God, why in the world would we encourage someone to become Christian?

So, it is important not to sign on to this orphan mentality. It is important to resist that tactic of Satan. But unlike Jesus in the Gospel, we should not engage the devil in dialogue. He's very sly, he's very smart, very cunning. He's been at this for a long, long time. So, don't try to win an argument. Don't even start an argument with the enemy. Reject him, reject him. Keep your eyes on God. But Jesus does give us a really good example of what to do when we are faced with these temptations that lead us or will lead us into an orphan mentality. He announces the truth of His relationship with the Father. That's what it is. The enemy comes at you with lies, resist by announcing the truth, not engaging in the dialogue, but simply announcing the truth. "As a beloved child of God, I am not an orphan. I am not rejected by God. I am not abandoned by God. I do not have any shame before God. I have not been without hope; my hope is in God." Announce the truth. Cling to the truth, stand on the word of God. His words tell us exactly what the nature of our relationship with Him is. And there's power in that. There is power in that. The orphan mentality will lead us into an ungodly self-reliance. As I mentioned on Ash Wednesday perhaps our whole campaign of Lent can be targeted in a certain way at our inordinate self-love and our failing self-reliance. Our prayer, our fasting, our almsgiving begins to tear down this power of self-love and self-reliance.

Brothers and sisters, you are not orphans, not with a Father in Heaven who loves you unconditionally. Unconditionally, infinitely, without bounds. Stand on that truth, live your life as sons and daughters of a loving Father.