

Matthew 4:1-11

Jesus was led by the Spirit out into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, after which he was very hungry, and the tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to turn into loaves.' But he replied, 'Scripture says: Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'

The devil then took him to the holy city and made him stand on the parapet of the Temple. 'If you are the Son of God' he said 'throw yourself down; for scripture says: He will put you in his angels' charge, and they will support you on their hands in case you hurt your foot against a stone.' Jesus said to him, 'Scripture also says: You must not put the Lord your God to the test.'

Next, taking him to a very high mountain, the devil showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. 'I will give you all these' he said, 'if you fall at my feet and worship me.' Then Jesus replied, 'Be off, Satan! For scripture says: You must worship the Lord your God, and serve him alone.' Then the devil left him, and angels appeared and looked after him.

In all three Gospels, Jesus' temptation takes place after his Baptism, during which he had been revealed as the '*Beloved Son of the Father*'. 'Do you really believe that, and if so, what's in it for you?' asks the tempter. In so doing, Jesus' temptation mirrors that of Adam and Eve and also of the Israelites, who were tested, and failed, in the wilderness. Jesus is truly human, therefore he too, must undergo this struggle, his temptation, but he overcomes the tempter and in so doing, gives us the perfect example of obedience: He looks to his Father for life, and trusts in his every word.

Jesus's 40 days in the desert is often the model for our Lent. It is in the desert, freed from our many distractions, that we are able to encounter the Lord. Coming into the presence of Goodness, will inevitably involve trials and struggle, as we are called to turn from our old sinful ways. Be assured, however, that as the Holy Spirit led Jesus and watched over him, so it will be the same for you this Lent.

1st Sunday of Lent

26th February 2023

With Jesus In the Desert



Jesus' 40 days in the desert, introduces & forms the model of our annual Lenten journey. Through His temptation, Jesus draws closer to His Father, seeking His will & it must be the same for us. This will require a turning from our self-centered, sinful ways, which in turn requires self-sacrifice. For this to happen, we must recognize our need for God & look to him for life. This is sung about in Psalm 51 - *The Miserere* - King David's great act of contrition after he had sinned: Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned

Opening Prayer

Grant, almighty God, through the yearly observances of holy Lent, that we may grow in understanding of the riches hidden in Christ and by worthy conduct pursue their effects.

Genesis 2:7-9,3:1-7

The Lord God fashioned man of dust from the soil. Then he breathed into his nostrils a breath of life, and thus man became a living being.

The Lord God planted a garden in Eden which is in the east, and there he put the man he had fashioned. The Lord God caused to spring up from the soil every kind of tree, enticing to look at and good to eat, with the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the middle of the garden.

Now the serpent was the most subtle of all the wild beasts that the Lord God had made. It asked the woman, 'Did God really say you were not to eat from any of the trees in the garden?' The woman answered the serpent, 'We may eat the fruit of the trees in the garden. But of the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden God said, "You must not eat it, nor touch it, under pain of death."' Then the serpent said to the woman, 'No! You will not die! God knows in fact that on the day you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods, knowing good and evil.' The woman saw that the tree was good to eat and pleasing to the eye, and that it was desirable for the knowledge that it could give. So she took some of its fruit and ate it. She gave some also to her husband who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they realised that they were naked. So they sewed fig-leaves together to make themselves loin-cloths.

Our passage today, coming at the very beginning of the Bible, is certainly not a naive, primitive piece of writing, but a parable telling the story of the beginning of humanity and how sin crept in. We hear two short excerpts telling how God gifts life to man and places him in the comfort and safety of Eden. The second excerpt tells how it all went wrong. The tempter leads Adam and Eve to question and doubt God's goodness. Sin and death are brought about by not listening to God; by turning away from him, failing to trust in his love. The sense of 'nakedness' brought about as a result of sin, is the awareness of our helplessness, our defencelessness, our shame before God. But all is not lost, man does not forfeit God's love. Yes, he made a mistake, but God's love is great and forgiving.

Psalms 50(51):3-6,12-14,17

Have mercy on me, God, in your kindness. In your compassion blot out my offence. O wash me more and more from my guilt and cleanse me from my sin.

*My offences truly I know them; my sin is always before me
Against you, you alone, have I sinned; what is evil in your sight I have done.*

*A pure heart create for me, O God, put a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from your presence, nor deprive me of your holy spirit.*

*Give me again the joy of your help; with a spirit of fervour sustain me,
O Lord, open my lips and my mouth shall declare your praise.*

Romans 5:12,17-19

Sin entered the world through one man, and through sin death, and thus death has spread through the whole human race because everyone has sinned. If it is certain that death reigned over everyone as the consequence of one man's fall, it is even more certain that one man, Jesus Christ, will cause everyone to reign in life who receives the free gift that he does not deserve, of being made righteous. Again, as one man's fall brought condemnation on everyone, so the good act of one man brings everyone life and makes them justified. As by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous.

In our Second Reading from Romans, Paul contrasts Christ and Adam. Adam is the founder of the Old man – Christ, the founder of the New. Adam forfeited life, so Christ brought about new life. But Paul's main contrast is in obedience - man's disobedience (which we read about in the First Reading) which lost life, and Christ's obedience which won life for us. For Paul, the crucifixion is the fullest expression of the union between Jesus and Father, a union expressing both love and obedience.

Praise to you, O Christ, king of eternal glory! Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.