

Year A, Lent 1 26th February 2023

Genesis 2: 15-17 & 3:1-7

Romans 5: 12-19

Matthew 4: 1-11

Temptation

It was Oscar Wilde who said, “I can resist everything except temptation”. A witty one-liner, with a semblance of honesty that most of us find uncomfortable.

Our gospel reading of Jesus being led into the wilderness by the Spirit, is an exploration of temptation. Jesus had just been baptised and his identity and life calling had been affirmed. At such a ‘high point’ it would have been easy to have been caught up in the enormity of it all. The Holy Spirit – holy wisdom indeed, led Jesus into the wilderness. In His humanity, Jesus needed time to live into this new phase of his life; to pray about his identity, he who was and what his mission would entail going forward. We too, are often at our most vulnerable after our own high points, and can be seduced by all sorts of temptations.

On Ash Wednesday we gladly stepped forward to be reminded of our mortality; it is a spiritually healthy act of faith which I commend. We start Lent with ashes; with mortality on our minds as we take an inward journey of reflection and prayer to explore both who Jesus is and who we are and what our shared humanity requires of us at this present time.

On the face of it, the tempter offers Jesus some reasonable things; food for his hunger, physical invincibility, and the power and glory that surely the Son of God rightly deserves...

The temptations may sound reasonable, but of course they are not. The temptations are set to test the very core motivations that Jesus identified with, and Jesus' calling to act in compassion and love to bring God's kingdom to earth.

The same temptations are all around us today.

Hunger and desire: not just food, but hunger for all of our desires. In our world today, can we sit with our desires, our wants? Can we articulate the obvious ones, but also the desires we prefer not to admit to? What do we hunger for? Let us sit for a minute in silence, and before our God admit to the hunger and desires we try to deny as well as those we readily admit to. Let us take time to reflect on what is it that lies behind those desires? What can we learn about ourselves from them?

Safety and Vulnerability: Anointed with ash, at least once each year we have to come face to face with our mortality and the ultimate fragility of human life, despite the wonders of modern science and medicine. The journey to the Cross teaches us that all of God's children still fall sick, still experience struggles and pain, still have accidents, and we all will die. Let us take a minute to reflect on what it is to be fully human, to be vulnerable, but also to know that we are all loved by God, even in our vulnerability, even with our imperfections.

Ego and humility: the tempter promised Jesus glory and authority, saying "All this I will give you". Tempted with fame, recognition, temporal lordship over kingdoms where people will come and do

obedience, kneeling before him; Jesus chose to labour in relative obscurity, to serve humbly, quietly, sometimes even secretly. Jesus' power resided in his humility and weakness. Let us take a minute to reflect on our own human relationship with our ego and with power, ambition, authority, success, and being liked. We know in our hearts that God's love for us is not contingent on any human definition of success. Does not God see us perfectly well when we are humble, serving quietly, working backstage?

Jesus chose hunger and deprivation over comfort and ease.

Jesus chose vulnerability over safety.

Jesus chose humility and obscurity over power, honour and worldly recognition.

The forty days of Lent (well, the thirty-six remaining days) is a time when, knowing God is with us, we are challenged to embrace all that it means to be human, in all its complexity and messiness. To be hungry and have unmet desires; some desires that should never be met as well as some that should. To be imperfect and vulnerable and yet blessed and loved by God. To have a complex relationship with who we are and how we use our influence, and yet want to walk humbly with our God.

May the God who loves us and meets us in our wilderness journey, grant to each one of us a holy Lent.