

1st Sunday in Lent

Gen 2:7-9; 3:1-7

Rom 5:12,17-19

Mt 4:1-11

Our road to redemption began in a lush garden in Eden after Adam said to God, “She made me do it,” and Eve said, “The serpent persuaded us to doubt what you said.” The blame game that began in the story of that garden was neutralised, but not obliterated, centuries later in another garden in Gethsemane when, unlike Adam and Eve, Jesus was obedient to the will of His Father, even though His prayer that the cup of suffering might pass from Him, was not answered. It is St Paul who reminds us that Adam was self-focussed while Jesus was humbly open to God’s will, irrespective of the cost involved.

St Matthew’s Gospel tells us that after being proclaimed the Son of God at His baptism, Jesus was sent into the wilderness to test His faithfulness and obedience to His Father. His temptations are a mirror image of the temptations of Adam and Eve as Fr Scot pointed out at his talk at the parish lunch, and the temptations the Children of Israel faced as they passed through the Red Sea and wandered through the wilderness for 40 years on their way to the Promised Land. These temptations are hunger (Ex 16), testing God’s faithfulness (Ex 17) and idolatry (Ex 32). As a child, Jesus also came out of Egypt. He passed through the waters of baptism and now He spends 40 days in the wilderness.

As Jesus was exploring how to conduct the ministry He had been given, the devil tempts Him to do for Himself what God had done for Israel when they were hungry. “Turn these stones into bread.” Feed the hungry and the people will listen to you. Jesus refused, stating that it is not his word that sustains life, but God’s (Deut 8:6). Jesus is then taken to the Temple where the devil quotes scripture at Him – (Psalm 91:11-12) – trying to sow doubt in Jesus’ mind about whether God’s angels would indeed keep Him safe if He jumped from the Temple parapet. In their wilderness wanderings, despite all that God had done for them, Israel still demanded proof that God was present among them (Deut 29:2-6). Jesus refused to make His Father prove Himself.

Finally, the Devil leads Jesus up a mountain to view all the kingdoms of the earth and their glory. All Jesus had to do to possess these kingdoms is fall down and worship him. Moses was taken up Mt Pisgah by God to view the Promised Land before Israel entered it. Moses warned his people that when they entered the Promised Land they must not worship the false gods of the nations that lived there. Of course, they did (Deut 31:20, Ps 106:35-37). Jesus refused to worship evil as though it were good. That is the sin against the Holy Spirit, and worshipping false gods is just that. Jesus forcefully dismisses Satan and without His request, God’s angels did come to minister to Him. This was another sign of the Father’s approval of His Son.

St Matthew makes it clear that by His triumph over evil, Jesus is the true remnant of Israel. In facing and resisting the same temptations as Adam and Eve and His forefathers, He showed he was stronger than Satan. He is the stronger one that John the Baptist said would come after him. However, evil never gives up, and others would emerge to test Jesus, but

through His faithfulness, He appeared on a mountain at His ascension into heaven and announced to His disciples that He had been given all authority, both visible and invisible, over the whole world.

The more things change the more they stay the same. The temptations that Jesus' disciples face in the Church today are no different. There is the temptation to focus entirely on the physical needs of people in the world and save the planet while neglecting to provide the heavenly food of Jesus in the Sacraments and in Scripture.

Secondly, we face the temptation that because God wants everyone to be saved, they will be, no matter how many bad choices they make or how many metaphorical high-rise buildings they jump off. Jesus didn't fall for that one – neither must we.

Thirdly, we are tempted to worship the false gods of the secular woke gospel of the Western world and accept its assurance that if we did, the world would embrace the good news of the Gospel. Jesus kicked that one out of touch – so should we.

Jesus shows us that evil can never be trusted. Evil sows doubt in our hearts and minds, but Jesus is stronger than evil will ever be. This is our faith, to trust the One who said He would always be with us however costly that might be for us.

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