

LENT 1 – 2020
Gen 2:7-9; 3:1-7
Rom 5:12-19
Mt4:1-11

The Road to redemption started in a garden when he said to God, “It wasn’t me, she made me do it., and she said,” It wasn’t me, the serpent told me it would be OK.” Adam and Eve made a decision that was contrary to God’s expressed will and ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They gained the knowledge that they were naked and vulnerable. They also knew they would die but didn’t know enough to prevent it.

The antidote to that wrong choice is given by Jesus in another Garden, the Garden of Gethsemane when he prayed, “Father, let this cup pass from me, but nevertheless, not my will but yours be done.” St Paul reminds in his epistle to the Romans that Adam was arrogantly self-focussed while Jesus was humbly open to God’s will, whatever the cost.

St Matthew tells us that Jesus was tested in the wilderness following his baptism by John the Baptist. He was preparing to begin his public ministry and during his reflections about how he would get people to listen to him, three temptations were presented to him by Satan. These were to feed the hungry and needy, become a miracle worker and magician and raise an army and seize power.

Jesus rejected these temptations and chose the more difficult path of showing God’s love for his people and deliver them from the grip of evil. The word ‘deliver’ in Greek is ‘exodus.’ The first exodus was the deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt. As the people travelled through the wilderness they were tested. When they were hungry and weak, God provided them with food from heaven – manna. ‘Turn stones into bread’ was the temptation to feed the hungry and people would listen. They would, as long as the goodies kept flowing.

When the going got tough in the wilderness, Israel panicked and ask Moses several times to give them a sign as an assurance that God was with them. In Jesus’ time, the Temple was the great sign of God’s presence, and there he provided a place of safety for his people. Jesus was tempted to jump off the Temple parapet and surely God’s angels would hold his hand as he floated down to earth. That would be impressive and be a sign that God protected him. People would follow him because they were afraid of him.

As the Children of Israel approached the Promised Land, Moses was led up a mountain and shown the land of the nations that would become theirs. Moses warned his people that they were not to follow the false gods of the local inhabitants but to remain faithful to God who had brought them to it. They disobeyed and were not open to God’s will and embraced the gods and ways of the Gentile nations, so they were punished and exiled by the Babylonians and had to be delivered again. They soon failed again, so God chose to deliver them from their self- centredness and invite them to respond to his love which would be revealed to them through Jesus, especially through his self-offering on the cross. Those Jews and Gentiles who responded and formed the New Israel, the people of God, have been reconciled to God and become his adopted children.

The temptations of Jesus are a mirror image of the temptations of Israel in the wilderness, and because of Jesus' humble openness to God's will, Adam's sin was cancelled and Jesus was given authority over all that is visible and invisible.

What are the temptations we face at this time that we must overcome? Firstly, to regard Christianity as nothing more than a social justice and welfare incentive with a religious veneer. Secondly, to believe that God will save everyone, no matter how they live, because he wants everyone to be saved. Thirdly, to embrace the gods, values and ethical standards of the secular world in order to become relevant in our pagan culture.

These must be resisted by the faithful. Keep the Faith and willingly embrace the cost of saying, 'Yes' to God.

Msgr Harry Entwistle
March 2020.