

10th March 2019 (First Sunday in Lent, Year C)

Deuteronomy 26:4-10; Psalm 90(91):1-2,10-15; Romans 10:8-13; Luke 4:1-13.

You must not put the Lord your God to the test!

At the beginning of the season of Lent, we are invited to watch the Spirit lead Jesus out into the wilderness, where he fasts and is tested. Immediately before today's gospel narrative we read that Jesus goes into the river Jordan and is baptised by John. There a voice from heaven declares: 'You are my Son, the Beloved;' and the Spirit comes on him in the shape of a dove. This Spirit now that leads Jesus into the wilderness.

In the Old Testament there are a number of stories where people encounter God in the silence and emptiness of the wilderness; yet it is also the place where the people of Israel, coming out of Egypt, are tempted and turn against God. The people of Israel is often referred to as the son of God, yet in the Old Testament they often reject God's will. Like the people of Israel, Jesus, the true Son of God, is also tempted, but stays faithful to God's will.

The tempter invites Jesus to doubt who he really is and to question the Father's love. Jesus is challenged: 'if you are the Son of God' why don't you try out some of your tricks for your own benefit? After forty days of fasting Jesus is hungry and weak, it would only take a prayer of blessing for Jesus to turn a stone into a loaf of bread, after all he needs nourishment! What is wrong in making use of his special powers to satisfy his own hunger first? But Jesus has come to serve others not himself, and so refuses this suggestion.

Jesus' aim is to save the universe and claim it for the Father; this leads him to his passion and death. In the second temptation the devil, who claims that he has full authority the whole universe, offers this to Jesus, saving him from having to endure his passion and death, as long as he worships the devil! Once again Jesus refuses the offer.

Thirdly, in order to prove that he is really the Son of God, the devil invites Jesus to jump off a high point in the Jerusalem Temple. If Jesus does this, God would be obliged to send his angels to protect Jesus, and the whole incident would immediately demonstrate to the whole world who Jesus really is, saving him the trouble and the pain of the cross. Once again Jesus answers that his role is only to obey the will of the Father, and the tempter leaves Jesus until the time of the passion.

God creates us in his own image and likeness and through our baptism and confirmation like Jesus we become children of God. Like Jesus we too are often tempted. Some of our temptations would be: why should we suffer if we are God's children? Does God really exist, and if he does, why all these tragedies in the world around us? Who am I; am I really in the image and likeness of God, invited to share in his divine life? In difficult times we tend to turn to God and challenge him.

Lent is the time for us to go out into the silence of the wilderness and encounter our God. We are invited to turn back to God and learn to trust God again by renewing the commitment we made at our baptism. If Jesus himself is tested and tempted to take an easy way, should we be surprised that we too have to face our own temptations.

Jesus does not give in to the temptations and commits himself to obey the Father's will in its totality. We are weak human beings and we often fail and turn away from our commitments. We doubt and question God in his abundant love and mercy. Lent is the time to start again. It is a time when we can once again promise to follow Jesus through his passion and death, knowing that he will be victorious in the resurrection.

Mario