

1st SUNDAY OF LENT YEAR C HOMILY 2022

Jesus' DESERT TEMPTATIONS

Lk 4.1-13

Dt 26.4-10

Rom 10.8-13

Temptation, temptation, temptation, is a reality for all of us, as it was for Jesus, as we hear here. At the same time, there are symbolic images here of the sorts of temptations that can get at each of us, as life unfolds in all of its unpredictable ways.

Once again, Brendan Byrne SJ puts it in a nutshell: *“Lent is a time when we are invited to go into the desert with Jesus: to share both his conflict and his victory, to feel something of our own weakness and temptations, to know the depth of our reliance on God’s grace. Only so, can genuine conversion occur”*. Jesus shows us the way to confront our choices, for good or for evil, for better or for worse, the desert being symbolic of a place where our own personal demons come out and try to possess us, in a metaphorical way!

Luke’s detail and sequence is a bit different to Matthew’s, with only one stone being presented for conversion to bread, as opposed to the larger numbers in Matthew, with the potential to start a bakery, as the Jerome Biblical Commentary suggests! Hunger is a basic human need, and could be seen to represent all of the ways in which we can be led down the wrong path to satisfy our basic urges, yet realizing that happiness cannot result from satiation of our basic desires, which can rather point us in the direction, and of perdition and misery into our own little hole of self-pity. In the first temptation, Luke has Jesus responding on a higher level, focussed on his mission to proclaim God’s love, based on his Word of promise, hope, love and forgiveness.

Certainly, our physical requirements need to be met, especially on the level of basic nutrition for food, drink and shelter, but there are limits to needs. On the other hand, we don’t need to live in 5 star luxury and wine and dine on the finest, with no reference to the needs of others, particularly where there remain fundamental needs, and so injustices, around us. And which is one reason why we have Project Compassion as our Lenten focus.

The old disciplinary laws of my childhood are still strong in my memory, as I think back to fish on Fridays and learning the fasting rules for Lent (*but only for those aged 18 to 59, I think!*) in the early 1960’s. I read an interesting article just this weekend, in an American Catholic magazine which suggested that fish for Lenten observance (now only Ash Wednesday and Good Friday anyway – who remembered?) was no real sacrifice, especially for someone like me, who loves fish. And I’ve quoted it before, but worth repeating, there was an archbishop somewhere back there who endured, or was it enjoyed lobster (and possibly oysters) on days of fast and abstinence from meat, given his prominent position of entitlement!! It’s not too hard to see that the point of it all was missed! Hardly deprivation or self-sacrifice anywhere in sight here!

Then there are our emotional needs, for love, affirmation, encouragement and forgiveness for wrongs and failures, which also form a part of who we are. We are not just mechanoids or robots, operating mindlessly as functionaries without purpose. We are social creatures who need to belong and to love, and to find meaning in our lives through our engagement with others and commitment to faith in a Jesus who offers us a path to follow, beyond our own selfish aspirations. He calls us, as his disciples, to respond to his call to *metanoia*, or a change of heart, to be more open to the spiritual dimension of who we are as well.

The second temptation is also relatable to our own situation in life, as Jesus is offered a freeway to authority and power, given his identity as God’s Son, with the suggestion of not needing to face the ‘hard yards’ of treading the normal path of life we are all on, at one stage or another. He already has the authority, from God as Father, but rather than it being expressed in dominating and controlling ways, he has not come to oppress, but to serve. It’s certainly a counter-intuitive model to the ways of the world with earthly temporal power.

Don’t we see an irony in the way in which megalomaniacal Putin has evilly acted to try and re-establish the supposed glory of old imagined Russian Empire, by suppressing freedom and not just oppressing, but at the cost of so many human lives, including those of his own troops, and even with the pretence of preserving Russian Orthodoxy, without a Christian principle in sight, but rather the opposite, in an evil way. No sign of Jesus and his message here! We continue to hope and pray for a peaceful resolution.

Then there is the third temptation, moved to the pinnacle of the Jerusalem temple, where he is tempted to power and glory through miraculous signs and wonders, which Jesus consistently and constantly shies away from, throughout his ministry, which is primarily about the good news being proclaimed to the poor and a message of healing, forgiveness and peace, not to forget love!

Finally, on Ash Wednesday, let's remember the 3 simple principles of Christian behaviour as a sign of repentance and humility – giving alms to those in need, being people of prayer, and making an effort at self-sacrifice and self-control, as a means of demonstrating a genuine change of heart in our determination to follow Jesus, and live his way, not just for our own good, but also, critically, for the good of others.

So now we'll take a further moment to reflect on the great work of Caritas Australia, as we continue to support Project Compassion through our regular ongoing contributions during the Lenten season, and beyond. (As we hear from Anatercia in Mozambique - Caritas video)

john hannon

7th March 2022