

First Sunday of Lent  
March 13, 2011  
Deacon Tom Barford

We come together to celebrate the First Sunday of Lent. Today Matthew gives us his account of the temptation of Jesus in the Desert. He tells us that Jesus fasted forty days and forty nights. In this reading Matthew captures the essence of the trials Jesus would endure and over which he would triumph throughout his life.

The tempter urges Jesus to turn stones into loaves of bread. Jesus rejects the temptation to reduce his divine mission to satisfying immediate, temporal needs. The tempter then suggests that Jesus prove he is really the Son of God by jumping off the parapet of the temple: God would send his angels to save him. Jesus rejects the temptation to put God to the test. Finally, Jesus rejects the temptations to idolatry, even if that worship would enrich and empower him with all kingdoms of the world.

Our lesson today is that we all have temptations, even Jesus had them. God allows the devil to tempt us so we can gain humility, trust and strength.

Once upon a time, four deacons were spending a couple of days at retreat in a cabin. In the evening they decided to tell each other their biggest temptations.

The first deacon said, "Well, it's kind of embarrassing, but my big temptation is bad pictures. Once I even bought a copy of the Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Edition."

"My temptation is worse," said the second deacon. "It's gambling. One Saturday instead of preparing my homily I went to the race track to be on the ponies."

"Mine is worse still," said the third deacon. "I sometimes can't control the urge to drink. One time I actually broke into the church wine."

The fourth deacon was quiet. "Brothers, I hate to say this," he said, "but my temptation is worst of all. I love to gossip – and if you guys will excuse me, I have to make a few phone calls!"

Bottom line: We all have temptations in our lives. And only one man totally resisted temptation. We hear about that man today. Jesus alone experienced the full force of temptation. We, on the other hand, are like plants that waver according to the way the wind blows. We are often weak, but each time we take a stand as Jesus did, each time we resist temptation, we actually gain power. That power ultimately comes from God. The power is real, but when we think it is because of our own strength, we set ourselves up for a big fall.

Jesus went into the desert to be tempted by the devil immediately after he came up from the water of baptism and the Spirit of God came upon him: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

With gratitude we welcome the good news that we are not alone in our test of faith, whatever it may be, because the Holy Spirit also came upon us when we came out of the water of baptism. Each of us truly are the beloved sons or beloved daughters of our loving God. Through this divine grace we can live in hope of sharing the faithfulness and triumph of Jesus.”

We enter the Lenten Wilderness to encounter God in our lives through the three purposes of temptation:

- Humility - to expose our true selves.
- Trust - to entrust our self to God’s will.
- Strength - to take power from temptation

To enter the Lenten wilderness to encounter God requires that we leave our pacifiers behind. Nothing is too small to give up – whether a chocolate bar or a bad habit we’ve gotten into – whatever we need to do to place our lives in God’s hands.

Lent calls us to decide, in the depths of our souls where God speaks to each one of us, what it means to be a person of faith, what values we want our lives to stand for, what path we want our lives to take on our own journey to God and the Easter resurrection.

If Father Lavelle were with us today he would remind us of the words in the Our Father when we say, “lead us not into temptation” and he would tell us we have a choice, we can just “say” these words or we can “pray” these words.

There are lots and lots of things that we fall prey to, many , many temptations which come our way each day. And society doesn't help. Someone once said: You can't stop birds from flying over your head but you can prevent them from nesting in your hair. We can't stop experiencing temptation; it is an ever-present part of the human condition. But we can stop them nesting in our hair; we can refuse to dwell on them. We don't have to get ourselves into such a state over our desires that we simply must fulfill them. What we need is a sense of perspective – we have to see these things as they really are: ordinary desires and fancies not necessarily to be indulged.

We are able to train ourselves, we are able to defer gratification, we are able to resist temptation once we have identified it and looked at it from the outside.

Because we are all “only human” and tend to be misled often due to temptations, God allows the devil to tempt us so we can gain humility, trust and strength and become his true servants.

These forty days of Lent are an invitation to us to spend time in the wilderness of our hearts and spirits to do just that: to confront the hard choices of our lives; to decide exactly how and on what we will focus our time and energy; to discern exactly what values and beliefs we want to live for, to hope for, to refuse “to live without.”

As Jesus said in response to Satan's final temptation:

“The Lord, your God, shall you worship and him alone shall you serve.”

To that I say, Amen!