

HIS TEMPTATIONS AND OURS: 1ST SUNDAY OF LENT C

The threat of rising interest rates, more taxes and less welfare, huge amounts of foreign debt putting a strain on health and education spending, are a lot of what we've been hearing about lately in our media. All this talk about money, understandable as it is, leaves us wondering: *'Is that all there is? Is it really money which makes the world go round? Whatever happened to human interest stories, to human relationships? Are our only values economic ones?'* Thank God we still have the living memory of Jesus, and the stories of his teaching and example to remind us that there's a lot more to life than money!

Today we remember how Jesus understood and obeyed God's highest commandment: *'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.'* *'With all your heart'* - i.e. with total determination! *'With all your soul'* - i.e. loving and serving God our whole life long! *'With all your strength'* - i.e. putting all our personal possessions, qualities and gifts, at God's disposal and for the service of others!

The love of Jesus for God and God's people was total and uncompromising. But this does not mean that it was any easier for him than it is for us. It's clear he had to struggle to choose between God and self. The tension and agony of it all is spelled out for us today in Luke's dramatic story of the temptations Jesus faced during that time when the Holy Spirit led him into the desert. There he spent forty days working out the meaning of his life, trying to discover just what God wanted him to do with his life. In the process he came face to face with certain alternatives, which he came to judge as subtle temptations.

First the tempter suggests to Jesus, extremely hungry after forty days of fasting: *'If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to turn into a loaf of bread.'* In other words, use your power and influence, not for others but for your own satisfaction, comfort and convenience. But even though Jesus is desperate for something to eat, he will not dally with this desire, not even for a moment. Instead he seeks nourishment of a different kind, relying on God's clear message *'One does not live on bread alone.'*

That was one kind of temptation. But the idea that next comes to Jesus is even more subtle and appealing. This is to use his intelligence and his charisma to gather round him the rich and powerful from every nation, and eventually, to become a great political leader. It's a temptation to fame and fortune and empire-building. This attraction is the very opposite of what God has said in Scripture about his chosen servant, the saviour of the world's poor and needy people. God clearly means his Messiah to be a humble servant, a suffering servant, someone who sacrifices his life in love. Jesus remembers this, realizes this, and takes it to heart. And so he blitzes the suggestion with yet another clear and definite command of God in Scripture: *'You must worship the Lord your God, and serve him alone.'*

The third temptation of Jesus (according to Luke) is to go to the very top of the temple in Jerusalem and take a flying leap from there. A stunt like this will surely attract a horde of followers, and prove to Jesus personally whether God cares about him or not. The very thought of it is fascinating. Jesus, however, promptly puts the idea completely out of his mind as he remembers and relishes God's word: *'You must not put the Lord your God to the test.'*

His replies are more remarkable if we remember that Jesus is feeling very weak, fragile and vulnerable. He hasn't eaten anything for forty days. And yet his fidelity and love towards God don't waver for a moment. What is his secret? Clearly it's his reliance on God's word in the Scriptures. He just keeps nourishing mind, heart, attitudes and life, by remembering the word of God.

What the three temptations have in common is the lure of selfishness for taking the soft options of security, power and prestige. We ourselves are often exposed to temptations to selfishness of one kind or another – in the form of pride, anger, lust, gluttony, envy, sloth, etc. Like Jesus we turn to God for guidance and strength, relying especially on the power of the holy Eucharist to remain faithful.

For better results when we are tempted, we would do well to do what Jesus did - read the scriptures, reflect on them and pray them. Our Church encourages the practice of reading, thinking about, and praying the scriptures each day of Lent. Whatever ways we choose to help us take God's word to heart, our Lent is meant to be a time for correcting our faults and raising our minds to God, a time of personal and community renewal, a time for coming face-to-face with God in his all-powerful word.

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