



The Holy Spirit Province REFLECTION

02 MARCH 2022



RESISTING TEMPTATION: 1ST SUNDAY OF LENT C

Deuteronomy 26:410; Romans 10:8-13; Luke 4:1-13

Economic sanctions to repel Russia, the threat of rising interest rates, more taxes and less welfare, huge amounts of foreign debt putting a strain on health and education budgets, have been much talked about lately. All this money talk, understandable as it is, may leave us wondering: 'Is that all there is? Is it just money that makes the world go round? Whatever happened to human relationships and human-interest stories? 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 much more to life than money!

Today we remember how Jesus understood and obeyed God's greatest 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 possessions, qualities, and gifts, at God's disposal 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. Like us, he had to struggle to choose between God and self. The tension and agony of it all are spelled out for us today in Luke's dramatic story of his temptations in 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, and how to best bring people to God. 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 does not dally with this desire, not even for a moment. Instead, he seeks a different kind of nourishment, by relying on God's clear message: 'One does not live on bread alone.'

The next temptation that comes to Jesus is even more subtle and appealing. This is to use his intelligence and charisma to gather around him the rich and powerful from every nation and 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. God means his Messiah to be a humble servant, a suffering servant, someone who sacrifices in love his young life for others. Jesus remembers this, realizes this, and takes it to heart. 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 that 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.

For forty days, he has eaten nothing. And yet his fidelity and love towards God do not waver for a moment. What's his secret? it's his reliance on God's word in the Scriptures. He just keeps nourishing his mind, heart, attitudes, and behaviour, by remembering and taking to heart what God has said.

What his three temptations have in common is the pull of selfishness. We too are often tempted to selfishness in one way or another. We may be tempted by pride, anger, lust, gluttony, envy, laziness, etc. Like Jesus, we must turn to God, his Father and ours, for guidance and strength to remain faithful. We must rely especially on receiving the power of Jesus our Saviour in both the Word of God and the Holy Eucharist.

So, our Church encourages us to read, think about, and pray the scriptures every day of Lent. Whatever booklets or other aids we choose to take God's word to heart, may we make it a time for correcting our faults and raising our minds to God. May we spend it coming face-to-face with God in his all-powerful word! Just like Jesus did!

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