

Lent 1C 2013

In The Wilderness with Jesus

In the gospel we have just heard, St. Luke is quite explicit: Before Jesus began his ministry, he was severely tested by Satan. He was tempted to abuse his divine power. Although this may disturb us, it should not. For while Jesus is truly the Son of God, he is also the Son of Man: a man like us in all things but sin. As we begin this Lenten Season, then, let us learn from Jesus' example.

Jesus goes into the desert to fast and to pray, and there Satan tempts him in three ways. First, after Jesus has fasted forty days and is hungry, Satan challenges him to use his divine power to save himself. *If you are truly God's Son, you can turn these stones into bread. If you are truly God's Son, you can save yourself.* But instead of saving himself by a miraculous display of power, Jesus chooses to trust in God. Aware that he lives by the power of God's word, and not by bread alone, Jesus trusts in the power of God to save him.

Having been defeated in this first encounter with God's Son, Satan chooses another way. The Father of all lies, the Prince of Darkness, the one who was the first to rebel against God, promises to give Jesus what he cannot give. If Jesus will worship him, Satan will give him all the kingdoms of the world.

Consider how tempting this temptation must have been. Jesus' ministry would be an immediate success. There would be no need to suffer and die. The world would shower him with glory and praise. But Jesus knows that Satan is the Father of all lies. And so he worships God alone.

Having been defeated by God's Son a second time, Satan seeks to deceive Jesus by quoting Scripture. *Cast yourself down from this temple, Satan says, for Scripture promises that*

God's angels will protect you from all harm. But Jesus knows that Scripture also says we are not to test God's mercy and patience. We must not presume that God will protect us no matter what we do.

Jesus overcomes Satan's temptation by trusting in God. He refuses to use his divine power to save himself. While he will use his power to save others, he will not use his power to save himself. Jesus shows that he is the Son of God, not by a miraculous display of power, but by trusting in the power of God to save him.

Lent is a time to enter the desert with Jesus to discover who we are. It is a time to struggle with ourselves and our desires, with Satan and his temptations, to discover something about ourselves. Who are we? What is our relationship with God? How faithfully do we follow Christ? What sin or habit needs to be uprooted from our life so that we can celebrate Easter with a pure and sincere heart?

As he tempted Jesus, so Satan would deceive us—if we allow him—into believing that we can live on bread alone, that there is no need for God, that the fullness of life is what we see, hear, and touch. *As he tempted Jesus*, so Satan would deceive us into believing that we can compromise our allegiance to God, that we can worship the world as well as God, that the world will be ours if we only compromise a few small principles. *As he tempted Jesus*, so Satan would deceive us into believing that we can take God's goodness for granted, that we can presume God's love, that it simply doesn't matter what we do or how we act.

When we are faced with these and other temptations, Jesus teaches us how to respond: (1) *Live by the power of God's Word*; (2) *Worship God alone*; (3) *Do not take God's love and mercy for granted*. Jesus teaches how to overcome every temptation by faith and trust. He teaches us

that if we are to be sons and daughters of his heavenly Father we must trust and rely on the power of God to save us.

So where will we be forty days from now when we leave the desert of Lent? Will our lives be changed and transformed? Will we be purified and renewed so that we can celebrate the Easter Feast with a pure and joyful heart? Will we leave the desert of Lent victorious with Jesus? If we do, we will share in the victory of his cross and resurrection. But if, at the end of Lent, we are still standing in the same place we are standing today, we will have squandered this time of grace. And who knows, perhaps this is the last Lent God has allotted to us. Who knows, perhaps this is our last chance to repent.