



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

1st Sunday in Lent Year C

You must worship the Lord your God, and serve him alone

Readings: Deuteronomy 26: 4-10, Ps 90, Romans 10:8-13, Luke 4: 1-13

The problem with familiarity is not, as the proverb goes, that it breeds contempt. At least, if it does, that is just a sad and bitter by-product. Familiarity can mean we simply know something so well and become so comfortable with that knowledge that it loses its edge, its power to speak to us, the very thing that drew us to it in the first place.

Today's Gospel is very familiar. Jesus, wilderness, fasting, temptation etc. etc., ergo it must be Lent, time to be miserable and give up chocolate or alcohol or, for fanatical ascetics, BOTH !

For ladies, for whom cocoa is an invaluable companion, and for gentlemen whose tot of rum is an invariable duty at the westering of the sun, there is good news. Lent has nothing to do with either of them and this morning's Gospel is far more serious than that.

It is no less than the annual recall to the foundations of our Faith, our acknowledgement of God as sovereign Lord of all and a recommitment of love and obedience, by us His children, to His service, as grateful beneficiaries of His mercy. Any physical discipline we may profitably take up is a spur to that end NOT an end in itself.

The Gospel tells us that Jesus is LED into the Wilderness by the Holy Spirit. These are the critical days between the public acknowledgement of His Person and Vocation at the Baptism in the Jordan and the beginning of His public ministry.

Most people who have wrestled with vocation will attest that these are often the hardest days of all. For all the preparation and encouragement and attestations and previous certainties, all is now laid bare to the very core of your being and your Faith. Is it me? Is it true? Who is God? What does He require of me?

So Jesus, led by the Spirit, retreats into the stark, blazing void of the wilderness to encounter, in His humanity, those immense fundamentals.

The physical discipline of fasting, now so tragically absent from our well fed comfortable lives, prepares the soul for greater discipline. The mastery of self often begins with the belly. (What a sacrifice and embarrassment to have to warn our friends that we can't eat meat at their Friday supper party or sit in a restaurant while others gorge steak au poivre while we are restricted to bouillabaise or a wretched turbot.) Let's get serious.

Into this stark aloneness of the wild places, where all normal parameters are gone, the enemy of God makes his play for Jesus – and for every disciple who is serious about following Christ.

So fierce an encounter is this that it finds its way into the prayer we say daily and often. 'Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.' Christ gave us this to pray because He has lived through it and shows us the Way to deal with the great enemy of Man.

The temptations are impressive.

In His hunger Christ is invited to change stones into bread. He is invited to transgress the very laws of the universe He has set in motion for selfish reason. Instead He chooses, in the fullness of time, to become Bread for the life of the world.

In His apparent powerlessness, He is invited to advance His kingdom by submission to a material power, to turn from God and make the Faustian pact with the Devil. Worship me and you can have it all. He is tempted to exchange His eternal power for a temporal one. Satan cannot grant eternity. God alone can do that.

Christ is invited to perform the dive from the Temple heights to demonstrate the Divine power and the ministry of the loyal angels.

He could, of course, have floated off the Cross, healed His own wounds, melted the nails and made the thorn crown blossom with roses.

He doesn't – because to do so would have taken Him away from the very humanity in which He had chosen to dwell and would have undone our salvation.

We may look afresh at these temptations and marvel. We are unlikely to be similarly tempted surely? Can we perform miracles? Could we rule the world?

But at the heart of all these temptations is of course the central question? Who is God? Is He the Lord of my life OR do I really worship another?

These are the questions that we come face to face with in the wilderness of Lent and in the disciplines of body and soul.

We do well to regard how Christ answers the Tempter.

In every particular Jesus responds, not by engaging with the error but by repudiating it with the Word of God. Indeed Jesus' three responses are all taken from Deuteronomy, the great exposition of the Law of Moses, God's Word given to His people.

In the midst of our time of wilderness we are invited to do the same. To proclaim that God alone is God and to reinstate Him as Lord of our life, especially via penance in the places where we have wandered from or been disobedient to His love.

We are invited to respond to the temptations of the world, the flesh and the devil with the Word of God in His Holy Scriptures revealed to us in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. That means knowing our stuff.

In order to do that it needs to be really familiar, in the proper sense of the word 'familiar', part of our family practice. We need to be penitent, disciplined, formed by the Word, faithful, glorifying God with our lives,

close to Jesus. That means: Disciplining our bodies. Listening daily to His Word and remembering it. Going to confession. Being at Mass. Representing Jesus in the world – out on mission.

I wish you all a season of renewal and holiness - a Lent with the Lord.

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