



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

1st Sunday of Lent Year B

Lead us not into temptation

Readings: *Genesis 9: 8-15, Ps 24, 1 Peter 3: 13-22, Mark 1: 12-15*

There is a line in the Lord's Prayer which often causes puzzlement to the uninitiated – and sometimes not just to them. 'Lead us not into temptation...'

We know, from our teaching and from experience that the quickest way to avoid sin is, wherever possible, to avoid the occasion of temptation.

We cannot always do so and we needs be clear that temptation is not sin itself though the longer we entertain (that is such an accurate description of our mental process), the longer we ENTERTAIN temptation the more likely we are to succumb. So we avoid.

However in this morning's Gospel passage we see the familiar story of Jesus, emerging from the baptism of John and the public manifestation of His calling and the proclamation of the reality of who He really is, and being DRIVEN by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness.

There He is tempted by Satan, the opposer of the will of God.

The Holy Spirit does not tempt Him nor is Jesus led there to be tempted per se. It is the reality of what happens when we set out to be obedient to God.

Here in the wild lonely places of existentialist reality, we are alone with our calling, alone with the great questions of life and death, the profound interrogation of who we are. Called to serve God those proclamations about us and the commitments we have made must undergo the most severe testing. Here, if we are to succeed in response to God's call, our wills must become utterly aligned with His. In Christ Himself the Devil must not be able to get a cigarette paper between the human will of the human nature of the Saviour and the divine will of His divine nature.

Here also we learn the lesson that Satan is most interested in us when we are fresh from a powerful spiritual experience and our hearts are set on doing great things for God. Satan is not interested in the spiritually inert. He already has them nicely tucked up in his warm blanket of apathy and indifference.

So, alone in the wild places of the extremes of our physical and spiritual exploration we are exposed, vulnerable to the logic of Lucifer, the once 'lightbearer' who now, in disobedience to God, has become the lord of the dark.

He does not always offer us sin direct but comes at us with subtle compromises, offers that are tempting but seem to be not wholly bad. But those particular details are not in Mark and we must leave their trail of self-gratification, fame and power for another year and another Gospel.

Mark simply identifies the stark reality of humanity's choice of alignment with God or with the enemy. This is not popular in much modern theology. Satan has convinced some of his most plausible servants of his non-existence and the consequences of straight denial of the Word of God.

So as we enter more deeply into this time of purgation and renewal we must be aware of the activity of the enemy but above all we need to be aware of the Way of Redemption. We pay absolute attention to Christ Himself. We seek to re-order our lives by His grace and in His image. We remember that the response to the Tempter is not to engage with our own wisdom but with the divine wisdom of the Word of God given us in the Holy Scripture and in the teaching authority of the Church.

We remember the signs, the sacramental signs of that redemption in the Holy Sacraments of the Church. We bring our fallen-ness and our failings - in what we do amiss and in what we fail to do for God – to the foot of the Cross for the absolution, renewal, healing and reconciliation won by His Blood shed for us.

We bring the gift of ourselves to the altar for transformation in the Body and Blood of Christ that will enable us, strengthened and encouraged, to take the Gospel out to a darkening world.

Finally let us pay attention to one other detail. The Gospel tells us that angels ministered to Jesus in the wilderness.

Let us never forgot the might of the Heavenly Host, the unseen presence that gathers at every Mass and, from the Archangels to our personal guardian angel, wait to assist us when we summon them to our aid.

Never be shy about calling upon these servants of God in the time of need. As the people of God we are, with their aid, to wage spiritual warfare. It is important to allow the enemy no foothold or purchase in our souls. We repent, we reconsider and radically reconfigure our lives to Christ because we believe in the power of His sacrifice to reunite us with the eternal love of the Father.

As important, for the salvation of the world, that is the message we carry to all who have not yet found the One who is The Way.

Only a penitent community can preach repentance to a disordered world. Only a believing community can preach Faith to the lost and life to the dying – Life that is glorious, full and forever. This is the work of Lent.

Bishop Mark has asked us to pray the Sorrowful Mysteries together during Lent. This, daily and individually and corporately before the Sunday Mass will bring us before the Cross.

Can I suggest that we include in our daily prayers someone who is lapsed and make them a special intention of our hearts – and then visit them before Lent is over.