



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

1st Sunday of Lent Year A

Temptation

Readings: *Genesis 2:7-9 – 3:1-7, Ps 50, Romans 5: 12-19, Matthew 4: 1-11*

First things first..... TEMPTATION IS NOT A SIN.

Christ Himself was tempted but without sin.

Temptation is a situation which Man has found himself in since his creation. The question is not 'Will I be tempted?' but rather 'How will I be tempted and where?'

From Eden onwards Man has been subjected to temptation. The source of that temptation lies in the furious and unquenchable jealousy of the Fallen Angels for the inexplicable promotion of Man over the angelic order. It is a war that has raged since the fall from Heaven of the 'once upon a time' lightbearer, Lucifer and his fellow disgruntled former dwellers in the Eternal Presence.

Lucifer looks for no less than the wholesale destruction of Man, the proof to God of His divine mistake in elevating 'Mudblood' Man over the ethereal realms of angelic harmony and exclusivity.

Brothers & Sisters, we are involved in a cosmic war.

So we will be tempted and we will learn to recognise the familiar tactics of the Enemy in trying to unseat us.

The serpent, as Satan reveals himself in Eden, proffers something that looks good. It is the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil. Good though it appears, it has been forbidden to Man by divine fiat. This seems to Eve unreasonable – and possibly, at first glance, to us too. Who, after all, would rejoice in our ignorance when there is a possibility of 'knowing'? And that is, like all the best lies, half true.

'Knowing good and evil is half good but....

Unfortunately, 'knowing' something, in terms of the Book of the Genesis, is a term for ultimate intimacy. (Adam 'knew' his wife and she conceived a son). God doesn't want us, made in His image, to be intimate with evil. So what looks like a command to stop humanity storming the godhead is, in fact, a loving protective measure insisted on by God.

This is not how Satan, the Opposer, presents it to Eve.

God, Satan claims, is protecting His own vested interest and knows that, once tasted the fruit would lead to power and indeed equality with God. God's commands, Satan argues, are self-interested baloney. Ditch the deference, don't be pushed around by God, eat this and you will be like Him! This is the great clarion call of the Enemy to the fountainhead of sin, PRIDE.

On discovering the disobedience of Man, his preference for sin, his pride in thinking he knows better than God, there is only one solution –. Before Man gets to the Tree of Life and eats of it and is immortalised he must be stopped, lest he embody and enshrine Sin in the Paradise of God.

So, here we are, outside of Eden, with mortality to pay and a regular invitation to temptation. For most of us these are petty enough but still they disfigure the image of God in us and keep us from our destiny in the Paradise of God.

In today's Gospel we get considerable clues as to how to deal with the temptations of the Enemy in the howling Wilderness of temptation with Jesus.

The short route to losing the battle with temptation is to engage with it. The familiar blandishments of the Enemy, lead us to encounter, usually, an old familiar weakness. (How often do we pitch up at the confessional with a list that might just as well say – 'Last time.....DITTO'. Or like a helpless drunkard, 'Same again, Father'.)

This is largely because we have failed to follow Jesus' example in today's gospel account. Jesus does not entertain the temptation. He rejects it simply with the Word of God. For our part, I suspect that when the old familiar temptation turns up, instead of giving it the Biblical 'Bum's Rush', we become internally conversational with it. In the end we invite it into our sitting room, offer it a comfy chair, give a glass of sherry and entertain it until it would seem rude not to fully engage with it. Love – fifteen.

Jesus answer is to dismiss it curtly with the Word of God. (Man does not live by bread alone but by every word that issues from them mouth of God) There is, therefore, no welcome for temptation, no discussion, no entertaining, no sherry. There is, instead, ruthless dismissal of anything that compromises the sovereignty of God or the integrity and destiny of Man.

Rule One then: - Keep it simple and obedient to the Word.

The second lesson that Jesus gives us is equally important.

There is, in much of what passes for theology in the modern era, an unspoken assumption of the profligate, almost incontinent mercy of God. That is not what Scripture actually teaches us. There is abundant mercy through the Cross but it can never be taken for granted. If we recklessly pursue disobedience there is judgement, awful and final. Both the prophets and the Gospels attest this. We must never presume on God's mercy. We are not in the business of putting God to the test , taking Him for granted as a sort of besotted and indulgent grandparent who, watery eyed, tolerates whatever naughtiness with which we conspire to offend His generosity and hold His counsel in contempt.

Rule Two: Don't presume on God' mercy but be truly amazed and grateful.

The third lesson is a simple one: Satan is a liar. He is indeed the Father of Lies. The false promises he makes are not within his gift or remit. The empty promise of power and dominion are dependent on submission to his malign authority and that is not the road to glory or freedom but the low road to slavery and the smell of burning from Hell's pyre of human hope.

Rule 3: Don't believe a word of what the Ultimate Unbeliever says.

Jesus, in the Wilderness, tempted yet without sin, gives us the key to dealing with our temptations, our dark wrestling in the wild places of our deserting heart. Jesus invoked in prayer will drive the greatest host of the dark lord fleeing before Him in the power of the Cross – which is the ultimate proclamation of the Tempter's defeat.