

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson
6th March 2022 - 1st Sunday of Lent

Readings (Year C): 1st: Deuteronomy 26:4-10. Psalm: 90. 2nd: Romans 10:8-13. Gospel: Luke 4:1-13.

One thing we all know is that we human beings face temptation. Jesus knows from his own experience that it is impossible to be human without being tempted. The experience of temptation enables Jesus to fully feel with us. In the gospel reading we see a Spirit-filled Jesus standing at the crossroads of his life. The devil knows that when Jesus leaves the wilderness he will embark on his public ministry, so now is the time to try and seduce him away from his mission.

Jesus found himself, all through his public life, tempted to take an easier more popular route. Pressure was exerted on him both by enemies and friends to say or act differently from what he did. His preaching of a new kingdom of God was uncomfortable, and many did not want to know. Those who wanted simply to see a better material world would be disappointed “man does not live on bread alone.” Those who looked for a political revolutionary would have to look elsewhere. Jesus did not intend to rule the world in that way. Those people would later shout “Not this man but Barabbas.”

In the threefold testing of Jesus he eliminated three forms of ministry which might have compromised his mission.

He will not buy people with free bread.

He will not seek power by compromising his principles with evil.

He will not fascinate people with sensational stunts.

The three temptations essentially invite Jesus to be a false Messiah.

We Christians individually face them: the ever present temptation to bring God down to our level rather than reach up to his. A temptation to see prayer as a bargaining power, to view faith as an insurance policy, The great lesson we learn is Jesus’ steadfast obedience to the Father’s will. He didn’t play around with temptation. He knew what the scriptures said. Without hesitation he affirmed his fidelity to God.

First for us, in a consumer society is the temptation is to **consume** everything that’s on offer. Everything is to satisfy my wants, not needs. Just look at the selfish panic buying just this week for fuel, not to mention when the 1st lockdown came about 2 years ago.

The second temptation for Jesus was **power**. Absolute power is devastating as we know at the moment. Thomas Mann has given an impressive description of this in his novel *Doctor Faustus*. In it the German composer Adrian Leverkuhn makes a pact with the devil so that he can always compose brilliant music. But the price he has to pay for his genius is love. He will never again feel love in his life. Those who subscribe to power their capacity to love. Their love becomes empty and cold. The warmth that only love can give vanishes from their live. Just look at pictures of Putin.

The third temptation relates to the image of **God** and Jesus’ relationship with the Father. Many of St Luke’s contemporaries were faced with the prospect of death if they would not deny their relationship with Jesus.

There would be no divine intervention to stop the sword or quench the burning pyre or the wild beasts. For us it can simply be just standing up for our Catholic faith, and the temptation to wriggle out of our knowledge of God.

What we all know, the devil in fact never leaves us. The slightest chink in our armour, and he’s in with his darts. The testing of Jesus clarified the nature of his mission. The temptations anticipated the accusations of his trial. And the strategy and victory of the Lord provides guidance and hope for Christians of all ages in their conflict with opposition.

At the imposition of ashes we hear the Lord’s battle cry: Repent and believe in; be faithful to the Good News of Jesus and his triumph.