

Deuteronomy 26.1-11, Romans 10.8b-13, Luke 4:1-13

You may be addicted to them, but the plethora of reality programmes on television don't appeal to me very much. There is one that is based on a programme called "Survivor" that began in Australia about twenty years ago. Now shown in many countries under different names, contestants are isolated (say) in the wilderness or the jungle and compete for cash and other prizes. As the show progresses contestants can vote off their rivals, or members of the public phone in to do likewise. In the end only one contestant remains and wins the title of something like "**Sole Survivor**"! It is a programme in which it would seem the end justifies the means, for almost any methods are employed to obtain the guaranteed success and status that will be bestowed upon the winner. Today's gospel story is about the ordeals someone else has to go through when the lure of worldly success and status is placed before them. But this contestant's response is very different – for Jesus' triumph is not in winning what's on offer, but in resisting.

Every year on the first Sunday of Lent we hear a gospel account of the temptations. However John doesn't include it all in, Mark covers the whole thing in two sentences - *the Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness, he was there forty days, Satan tempted him, wild beasts kept him company, and angels waited on him* - so if we remember more than that then it is from Matthew, or from Luke, as we heard it today.

We are now a few days into a dramatic shift in the church's year. As we were reminded at our Ash Wednesday services, the Church has come to recognise that *by a careful keeping of these days, all Christians might take to heart the call to repentance and the assurance of forgiveness proclaimed in the gospel, and so grow in faith and in devotion to our Lord.*" Lent is a time to get back to basics of the faith and see something of who Jesus is, and who we are.

In his resistance of the temptations Jesus shows that he is the fulfilment of the command that was at the heart of Judaism: *"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, is the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might."* (Deut 6:4-9). His response, his resistance, to the lure of wealth and power show that however difficult the situation he was not prepared to compromise his faith. Jesus showed himself to be the fulfilment of Israel's heritage, the Son of God who loved the Lord with all his heart.

In some ways today's story can seem unreal, far removed from our experience. After all, at least as far as I know, the devil does not appear to us personally and transport us from place to place, articulating exactly what the temptation is....

- Hungry? Then just turn these stones to bread
- After power and status? Well the authority and splendour of all the kingdoms of the world

are yours for the asking

- Want to prove that as God's son you can do anything ? Well why not throw yourself off the highest point of the Temple, for surely God will save you!

Remember, the temptations of Jesus come at the beginning of his ministry. He is baptised by John in the Jordan, and full of the Spirit is led by the Spirit into the wilderness for forty days – a time of preparation for his ministry that was to be one of furthering God's mission of bringing healing and wholeness to the world – of feeding the hungry, curing the sick, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom.

We know only too well for ourselves that temptation is a universal human experience. Had Jesus not been tempted he would not have been human, so the chance to turn bread into stones to satisfy not only his own hunger but the hunger of the world, to have the power and authority to command others to do as he wished so that God's ways could be brought in and spread throughout the world must have been temptingbut Jesus knew that the ends could not justify the means. His power lay not in overcoming a set of obstacles to receive the glittering prizes set before him, but in the power of resistance. Rooted in and fuelled by his complete trust in God, Jesus' power was one that embraced a different set of values - self-giving, humility and servanthood, fasting and self-control.

But are the temptations that faced Jesus really so very far removed from what we face in the world today – power and influence, wealth and consumption, personal appetites and greed? It seems to me that most of the big justice issues fall into one of these general categories. And whatever the temptation we live in a world where we are surrounded, if not bombarded, by the lure, the power of the quick fix. Even in an economic crisis credit seems readily available – can't afford it, well take out a store credit card. Hungry – no problem, never far from the supermarket. No time to cook then the cafe, restaurant or takeaway will fill the gap nicely. Clothes don't fit any more – no problem, fgve them to the charity shop and buy a bigger or smaller size – usually bigger in my case !! And we do not need to work so hard at forging personal friendships and relationships for texting, email, and internet social networks fill the gaps nicely for us.

Jesus' power lay in avoiding the quick fix and remaining faithful to the call and purpose of God. And if you think about it *“he did accomplish each of these' temptations' but by taking a different course. He changed bread into stones: a few loaves of bread and five fish fed five thousand. He did 'hurl himself from a tower” and was “caught by angels” by giving up his life on the cross. He is now worshipped, by but humbling himself as a servant”* (adapted from Nora Gallagher in the Essay

'Ashes to Fire)

As we journey through Lent we are invited, compelled, to remain faithful to the call and purpose of God:

As we were ashed on Wednesday we were not told to give up chocolate or biscuits or alcohol but to “turn away from sin and be faithful to Christ”. If giving up such things help us to do so then fine, but let us pray that during these forty days we will come to see that the power of the quick fix for ourselves and others can be the biggest temptation of all. And let us pray that, like Christ, we too can be rooted in and fuelled by complete trust in God, embracing the “power-full” values self-giving, humility and servanthood, fasting and self-control.

Susan Macdonald