

Temptation is the key word in today's Gospel; it is a word all too familiar to us, and in the wilderness of Lent we will face temptation with the Lord, fast with him, and spend time considering our sins and the ways in which we fall short of the Gospel life. It is a great encouragement for us to remember, though, that the Lord was tempted too, tempted (as the Letter to the Hebrews reminds us) in all things as we are – he knows what it's like to be fully human. He, though, has enabled us to overcome our temptations, to pass through the wilderness of our weakness and into the Promised Land of Heaven. And it is this epic journey that S. Matthew has in mind when he tells us of the temptation of Christ in the wilderness.

Just as the people of Israel spent forty years being tested in the wilderness, so Christ spends forty days in the wilderness and is tested by the devil. Although in the end the people of Israel did pass through their time of trial and enter into the Promised Land, Moses their leader, and Aaron their first High Priest, succumbed to the temptation to give up on God, and never entered this place of rest. In today's Gospel, though, we hear that the Lord succeeds where they failed; Christ trusts entirely in himself and in his heavenly Father in a way which most of us would find impossible. For unlike the Lord we are all too easily swayed by self-interest or self-preservation. It can sometimes seem impossibly difficult to trust that doing the self-less thing will bring the best result.

But Christ's temptation was, somehow, the way in which he made it possible for us to overcome that self-interest; for at the beginning of his ministry, Jesus makes the journey that no-one has completed before, through the wilderness and into a promised land which lies beyond temptation and sin. And then, having forged a path through this, he turns around, and comes back to bring us with him. As we begin to look towards the Passion, we should not forget that it is the work of the Lord's entire earthly life, from its first moment to the fulfilment of his ministry on the Cross and in the Resurrection and Ascension, which is itself the forgiveness of our sins. His many victories over the powers of evil, whose origins we heard about in our first reading, break the bonds of sin that hold us in weakness and death.

In our second reading from the letter of S. Paul to the Romans, we heard that 'as one man's fall brought condemnation on everyone, so the good act of one man brings everyone life.' This

'good act' is the obedience of Christ to the will of his Father; whereas the grasping hands of Adam and Eve brought death, the stretching out of the Lord's arms on the cross brings life.

On Good Friday we will be brought to this other tree, not one of the trees in the Garden of Eden, but one set on a hill outside Jerusalem. From this tree Jesus looks down upon the world, and, rejecting the temptation to give up on his mission, he completes his victory over the devil and temptation in one perfect self-less act. Whereas Adam and Eve grasp at the apple in self-interest, Jesus opens his arms wide in his great self-offering to the Father.

And there on the cross Jesus unites himself to each one of us as we too are faced with the temptation of choosing sin and death over life. On the cross Jesus Christ utters his great 'yes' to the Father, a 'yes' that he makes on behalf of each one of us, and what's more he invites us to share in this – to live our lives in the hope of his resurrection, not in the difficulty and temptation of sin. Live in that hope, then, resist the temptation to self-interest, and live in the trust which the Son has for his heavenly Father.

One last thought. Where is your wilderness this Lent? There is a temptation for us to think of our present situation, being without a Vicar, as a sort of wilderness. Let me tell you now, though, that this is no wilderness. And it cannot be, for in this place the prayer of the Church continues, the Sacraments are administered, the people of God are being taught, the pastoral care we show for each other is as strong as ever. Now is not the time to be despondent, or to back out of our common commitment to our brothers and sisters in the Lord. We have much to celebrate here, not least the love of God in Christ which has wrought our redemption and which changes lives. Here we are confident in that; let us then seek together to be a people through whom God can continue show that love. In our world, in every day life where greed, self-obsession and selfishness are so common, the showing of love, selfless love, can make an enormous difference. And perhaps if we are lucky, the angels will minister to us as they did to the Lord during his temptation.