

1st Sunday of Lent

As we begin Lent together, we become aware that we, like Jesus in today's Gospel, are being tested. We meet God and the adversaries of God in the wilderness of our lives.

Let us pray and hope for the same angelic support that Jesus found as he began his public calling to proclaim the Good News from God.

Today's Readings

Genesis 9:8-15

God gives us the rainbow as a sign of God's everlasting covenant with humankind.

1 Peter 3:18-22

God's will is to save us all. Baptism is God's pledge to us of this desire.

Mark 1:12-15

After being tempted in the wilderness by Satan, Jesus begins his proclamation of the Good News from God.

Reflection



“Jesus was tempted by Satan,
and the angels looked after him.”

Two stories. I ask you to listen, not with **TV** ears and hearts, but with **faith** ears and hearts. In other words, I’m not telling these stories to entertain you. They’re stories that give images that, I hope, will put us in the mood for Lent.

My first story concerns a man called Dr Scott Peck. Some time ago he was quite famous as a psychiatrist and author—some of you older people may, at least, remember his name. Anyway, he once told a story about how, as a Psychiatrist, he was counselling a man who was in the American army. This man, a sergeant, was stationed in Okinawa in the 1940s and 50s. This sergeant was in serious trouble because of his excessive drinking; he was being counselled for it by Dr Peck. In their sessions the sergeant denied that he was an alcoholic; he didn’t even think his use of alcohol was a problem. He justified it by saying “There’s nothing else to do in the evenings in Okinawa, except drink.”

Dr Peck then asked him if he liked reading, and the sergeant said he loved reading.

“Then couldn’t you read a book instead of going out drinking. “Nah, the barrack’s too chaotic with all the guys.”

“You could go to the library,”

“No, the library’s too far away,”

Dr Peck suggested that, in fact, that the library was no farther away than the bar, and the sergeant admitted that he wasn’t really that much of a reader after all.

Then the doctor suggested fishing, which the sergeant liked, but he said he wasn’t available during the day and Okinawa didn’t have any night fishing.

Peck came back with an offer to put the sergeant in touch with some people who were enthusiastic night fishers, and suddenly the sergeant said that, well, he wasn’t really much of a fisherman either.

“So,” Dr. Peck said, summing things up, “There are things you could do here besides drink, but given the choice, you’re going to choose drinking over any of them.”

“I guess that’s right,” said the sergeant.

“But since it’s getting you in all this trouble, it looks as though you’ve got a pretty severe dilemma on your hands.” The sergeant, rather angrily, answered, “**This island would drive anyone to drink!**”

It’s a story, but you must probably get the point: the sergeant is us; we’re always rationalizing our less-than-Christ-like behaviour. In a sense it’s a story, a parable, made for Lent, because Lent, is here, a bit like Dr Peck, to tell us to stop deceiving ourselves; to confess our sins, not our excuses. It’s a time to strike our breasts and face up to it, crying out, “O God, be merciful to me, a sinner!”

My second image-story is a familiar story to all of us these days. It’s about a mother named Sue. Sue’s standing at the kitchen sink, working hard getting dinner ready, her mind’s fully committed to the task at hand, peeling potatoes. Her middle son, three-year-old Steven, is playing nearby. After a few moments she felt a tug on her skirt proceeded by the words, “Mummy...” She nodded something like “uh-huh” or “yes, what is it?” and carried on peeling the potatoes. There were more tugs on her skirt and more little sounds: “Mummeeee...” Again, she said “I’m listening ... ” and still got on with her household tasks.

Five minutes passed. Steven continued to prattle away and then she felt those tugs on her skirt again. This time the tugs seemed harder and more determined. Mumeeeeeeee! Finally she put her potatoes down in the sink and bent down to her son. Steven took her face in his two little chubby hands, turned her directly to his line of sight and said, “Mum, will you listen to me with your eyes?”

That rings a bell, for here we are: modern, multitasking, busy people; sometimes we treat the people who need us, the people we love, almost as though they were a distraction from “what really matters.” You know: mobile phone to the ear, attention on the computer screen, half an eye on the TV. And all the time, all that our nearest and dearest want, is that we listen with our eyes so that they know they’re important to us. It’s the same with the poor, the sick, and the needy: they want to hold our faces in their line of vision so that, like Mother Teresa, we can actually see them and respond to them.

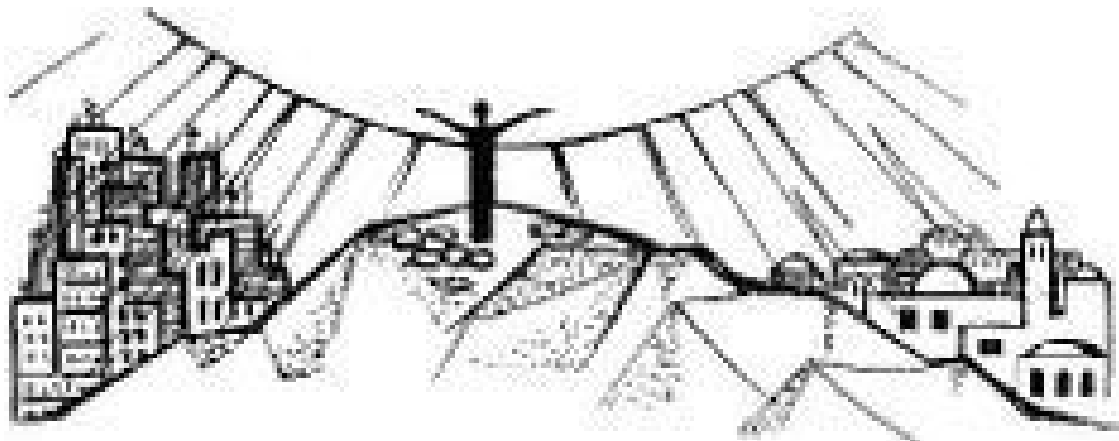
So never mind all the grand schemes of “doing something for Lent.” There’s two little spiritual challenges and they’re very much an invitation, this Lent, to a deeper spirituality.

1. **Stop rationalising my behaviour** (making excuses).
2. **Really listen to other people this Lent.**

So two stories. But I’ve got a parting suggestion. If you want to carry around a kind of spiritual mantra or image for Lent, why not picture Jesus as being like little Steven: listen to Jesus saying to you what Steven said to his mother: “Listen to me. Listen to me with your eyes!” In other words: Jesus is saying: “Put aside all those distractions and give me your full attention - these 40 days of Lent.

Yes, listen to me with your eyes—

and with your heart.”



“The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel”.

The Church marks the 40 day Lenten observance as an opportunity to make a new beginning with God. In the bible, the desert was a place of special encounters with God. The Israelites spent 40 years wandering in the desert after the exodus. Elijah spent 40 days in the desert until he was strengthened by God to resume his prophetic task. Mark wrote that after Jesus' baptism, the Spirit sent him into the desert for forty days to confront the powers of evil, which Mark termed "the wild beasts".

In contrast to the disobedience of God's people, Jesus rejected every temptation to earthly power. The ways of the world were not the ways of Jesus. As disciples of Jesus, we reject the so called "wisdom of the world" with its political power and military might. In Jesus, God's kingdom arrived and the Messianic era had begun, a time for the restoration of all creation.

Matthew wrote: "The devil left Jesus for a time". Temptations keep coming back; but we've got to put our trust in Jesus' message to repent and believe in the good news (gospel).

RITE OF ELECTION

In normal years today is the day when we formally announce the names of the people who are soon (at the end of Lent) to become Catholics.

Usually the actual 'rite of election' takes place in Brentwood Cathedral with the bishop on this First Sunday of Lent. Those people who enter the cathedral as "catechumens," leave as "the elect" (the chosen people). Godparents or Sponsors testify that the catechumens are worthy to be initiated. The entire assembly may also join the affirmation.

Next the bishop invites the catechumens to sign the book of the elect. In some dioceses, this has already taken place in the parishes during the rite of sending, and the books are presented to the bishop at this point.

Finally, the bishop declares that the catechumens are members of the elect, to be initiated into the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil.



Lord Jesus, I reject Satan, and all his works and all his empty promises, so that I may live in the freedom of God's children (Renewal of Baptismal promises).

WORDSEARCH

S	S	Y	A	D	E	S	S	T	E	SPIRIT	WILDERNESS	TEMPTED
T	S	N	T	E	M	P	T	E	D	SATAN	WILD	BEASTS
S	P	E	I	R	I	T	P	S	E	ANGELS	GOOD	NEWS
A	N	W	N	R	O	I	E	M	T	CLOSE	REPENT	BELIEVE
E	S	A	I	R	A	F	V	P	S			
B	E	T	T	N	E	P	E	R	E			
A	S	O	G	A	G	D	I	D	R			
T	O	E	O	O	S	E	L	W	R			
A	L	A	O	G	E	I	E	I	A			
S	C	D	N	E	W	S	B	L	W			