

1st Sunday Lent A (Matt 4:-1-11)

Our Gospel today tells us that Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the Devil. The New Testament makes two things clear. The first is that his temptation was real. Jesus wasn't pretending to be a human being. He was indeed a male human being. His struggles with temptation were not a religious performance; they were a real part of the most real life ever lived. The second thing the New Testament makes clear is that his temptations were like ours. They were people temptations, the kind we find in our world and in our lives. Let's look at the temptations of Jesus.

The first temptation was to turn the stones into bread. This involved more than the working of a miracle to alleviate his own hunger. It had to do with Jesus' public ministry. Satan was saying to Jesus that the way to win the hearts of people is to give them bread. Jesus was tempted to raise the material hunger above the spiritual.

Sometimes we face that temptation in our own lives, like placing our list of necessary food, clothing, shelter, medical care, entertainment above our spiritual needs. Material needs are necessary, but will they dominate our lives to the detriment of our spiritual values?

The second temptation is perhaps difficult to understand. Satan took Jesus to the top of the temple and suggested that he jump down. This suggestion was based on a promise of God that he would send protecting angels to keep him from harm. What is the real meaning of this temptation? It was perhaps a subtle attempt to pervert the principle of faith in God. This of course was the principle that Jesus both lived and taught. The temptation was to dramatically demonstrate his faith and prove to the people that it really works. The true evidence, however, is not dramatic deliverance from the dangers of life, but steady performance in the midst of them.

The last temptation was to do the easy thing instead of the right thing. The devil took him to a high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and said, "All these can be yours if only you will fall down and worship me." He is faced with two roads toward differing kingdoms, the kingdom of political and military power, and the heavenly kingdom of peace, justice, and love. St. Ignatius in his *Spiritual Exercises* describes the two positions as the Kingdom of Satan and the Kingdom of God. Jesus had a choice and so do we. The hard choice is often the right choice, and we are called to make frequent choices in our daily lives. In this sense we are definitely pro-choice, pro life giving choice, for we are people who seek the kingdom of God Jesus promised us. And we don't make our choices all alone, for we have Jesus and his Holy Spirit with us, as we are nourished and given courageous hearts in the Eucharist of Jesus.

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