

First Sunday of Lent Yr B



Mark 1:12-15

12 Immediately afterwards the Spirit drove Jesus out into the wilderness 13 and he remained there for forty days, and was tempted by Satan. He was with the wild beasts, and the angels looked after him.

14 After John had been arrested, Jesus went into Galilee. There he proclaimed the Good News from God. 15 'The time has come,' he said, 'and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe

the Good News.'

Other readings: Genesis 9:8-15 Psalm 24 (25) 1 Peter 3:18-22

It is an ancient custom in the Church that the story of the temptation of Jesus in the desert should be read on the first Sunday of Lent. Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness. At the beginning of the forty days of Lent the Church always puts before us his time of solitude. The temptation of Jesus is recounted in the three gospels known as 'synoptics', the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. While Matthew and Luke give an extended version of the tradition, telling us that Jesus fasted for forty days and reporting a dialogue between Jesus and the devil, Mark simply gives the outline of the story.

Jesus has just received baptism from John in the river Jordan and he is filled with the Spirit. This same Spirit drives him into the wilderness, the place of desolation and loneliness, thought to be the habitat of evil spirits. Jesus' forty days in the desert remind us of the forty day journey of the prophet Elijah to the holy mountain where his call is renewed in the 'still, small voice'. We may even compare Jesus' stay in the wilderness with the forty years of wandering by Moses and the people.

The central statement is that Jesus was tempted. To be tempted is the fate of all human beings. That Jesus was tempted shows his humanity. He was 'like us in all things but sin'. He did not give way to temptation. Mark balances his statement about temptation with the laconic declarations 'he was with the wild beasts' and 'the angels looked after him'. The evangelist shows that this Son of Man is at peace with all creation and cared for by the providence of the Father.

Our gospel reading concludes with a reminder of Jesus' mission, to preach the 'good news' from God, to announce that the time has come and that the kingdom is approaching. These statements of Jesus have a particular resonance as we begin the season of Lent, a time of self-examination and self-denial. We are invited to welcome God's special time of blessing and the coming of the kingdom into our lives.

How does the story of the temptation enrich my understanding of the humanity of Jesus?

How does this story strike me as I begin Lent?

Let us pray for the Church as we begin this season of fasting and prayer.

Let us pray for the hungry, and let us work for a fairer distribution of the world's goods.