

Enjoying Temptation!

Deuteronomy 26¹⁻¹¹; Psalm 91¹⁻¹¹; Romans 10^{8b-13}; Luke 4¹⁻¹³

*And when they were over, he was famished.
[Luke 4²]*

The Bishop of Leicester copied the idea of Bishop Sentamu, at that time, of Birmingham and decided to walk round his Diocese during Lent. It was a very positive thing for him to do and he enjoyed being with the people. The following year he wanted to do something similarly people-centred and decided to travel by public transport. His first journey was to Earl Shilton and on the bus a young lady sat next to him and talked about her life. She didn't know whether she should stay with her boyfriend or not! The deciding factor seemed to be that he owned the fridge! That was too much for the Bishop and he arranged for his Chaplain to come and pick him up and no more was said about public transport. (I made the suggestion the following year that he spend Lent in a Parish that had no incumbent, but he didn't think that was a good idea at all.)

The trouble with trying to get closer to God during Lent is that the Devil knows our weak spots! We make promises to read the bible and pray more or give more - and we do that because we know we are weak in those areas. So does the Devil!

That is why it is so important to take note of what Paul says in Romans and what the Hebrew people were taught in Deuteronomy:

- ✦ Paul reassures us how easy the beginning of faith is - **if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and if you believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.** When we get depressed about our failures and the Devil is reminding us about how bad we are - this is all we need to know. **Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved!**
- ✦ Deuteronomy then reminds us that, although we cannot buy faith or even contribute towards it, God affords us the dignity of showing our appreciation. God had delivered them from Egypt and so they brought to God **the first fruits!**

But the Gospel, which is the focus for today and for Lent, makes one very important point that is often overlooked: the temptations of Jesus don't happen until after the 40 days of fasting. The Devil knows that when we are most vulnerable and the Devil is tempting Jesus to take an easy way forward:

- ✦ The first temptation was to turn a stone into bread. Of course Jesus could have done this - his fast was over! However, the Devil was tempting Jesus to do something easy (we know that he can create food for thousands, but when the time was right) - what would a miracle that satisfied Jesus hunger in this private setting teach us about the glory of God?
How many of us are tempted to do things for our own comfort and ease rather than wait for God's time?
- ✦ The second temptation was to bow to the Devil to have the world bow to him. This was a short-cut to Jesus final aim - and would, on the face of it, by-passed the passion and the cross. Yet God knew that Jesus had to die - and that the Devil was making a false promise: the world wasn't his to give - and his love of power would be beaten by the power of love.
How many of us are impatient with God and, if we could, would sidestep uncomfortable and painful things, even if we know that to be God's will?
- ✦ The third temptation was to push God into action to protect his son. The Devil often tempts by suggesting that God doesn't care.
How many of us push the limits of God's care - or even the love that there is within the Church? How easily the Devil raises a question in our minds about how secure we are in God and amongst his people.

What is clear is that Jesus didn't give in! He fought back using Scripture. **It is written!** The Devil may play games with us, but we can't play games with him: the only defence is attack and the only sure means of attack is God's Word.

Unless Christians know their Bible they are defenceless!

Anyone here been tempted to do anything they didn't enjoy? That's how well the Devil knows you - and that's how well you need to know your Bible to stand any chance against him!