

St Botolph's Church Worthing
First Sunday of Lent, Luke 4: 1-13
Father Roger Walker

We seem to have been waiting for the story of Jesus' Temptations for quite some time. Recently we've had in our Gospel Readings his Baptism – his first miracle at Cana in galilee and even last week in his Transfiguration. But, of course, it is very appropriate on this first Sunday in Lent that our thoughts should be turned to temptation, because one of the things we should do in lent is to examine our lives and see how well we are resisting temptation. At first sight Jesus' temptations don't seem to have much to say to us – we are not going to be tempted to turn stones into bread – to jump off a high tower and challenge God to catch us – nor to be offered the Kingdoms of the world if we worship the Devil. But one of the lesser temptations that we suffer that can be put aside with the words of Scripture that Jesus quoted each time.

After his first temptation – stones into bread – he quoted to the Devil from Deuteronomy 8:3, 'Man does not live by bread alone'. Hanging there is the end of the verse, 'but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'.

Now food is one of our great temptations. We have to eat to live, but too many of us live to eat. Consuming more than we need and, quite apart from the spiritually damaging sin of giving in to greed, we put on weight as well and make our bodies less efficient than God designed them to be. Most of us have probably given up for Lent something we like to eat or drink, so greed will be hitting us more than usual. We can tell ourselves that man does not live by bread alone - or cake or chocolate or wine – but our spiritual help comes if we turn to the words that proceed from the mouth of God. That is, the Bible.

We noted last week how daily Bible reading will be important to us during Lent, and here it is in response to a temptation to greed. Next, Jesus stood on a high place and looked at the different kingdoms spread out below him. The Devil whispered "worship me and it is all yours", but Jesus answers him with more from Deuteronomy 6:13 "Worship the Lord your God and serve him only". Prayer and worship must be for us a central part of our Lenten observance. We remarked last Sunday how important it is to set up a time for daily personal prayer. Equally important is coming together and even more important for us in lent, when the reminders of temptation can be so close to us, and we need to be reminded that we worship God because we love Him, not because we want something from him.

In his final temptation of Jesus the Devil is really cunning, for he cloaks his temptation in words of Scripture. This time from Psalm 91, giving the impression that if Jesus were to jump from the temple pinnacle and come unharmed to the ground he would be fulfilling the words of Scripture. But Jesus is not taken in. he goes back to Deuteronomy once more – 6:16 – and states boldly "you shall not put the Lord your God to the test". And this – putting God to the test – is one of the temptations that we can fall into, especially when we are concentrating on prayer. We get so used to God

answering our prayers, and you've seen this very powerfully with the change of plan for the future of St Botolph's. Incidentally you do need to keep praying for wisdom for the Diocesan authorities as they make plans for the long-term future of this Parish. But our prayer always has to be "thy will be done", not "Lord, we know this is what the future should be – please make it happen", and then being disappointed and disillusioned when God has other plans.

Remember that God has three answers to prayer – Yes – No – and Wait. If the prayer is along the lines of that mock Negro spiritual "Lord, won't you give me a Mercedes Benz" then the answer is going to be No. So our intercessory and petitionary prayer this Lent – those are long words for prayer for others and prayer for ourselves – should always be phrased to include "if it be thy will". Do remember that we don't just ask for things in prayer. We give praise and worship, we confess our sins, and very importantly we give thanks to God for what He has done for us. Plus of course, we spend time quietly to let God speak to us.

We may not have been able to align Jesus' temptations very closely with ours but the way in which Jesus used Scripture to answer the Devil has brought us to see how reading and knowing the Bible is important to our Christian lives and that ultimately it cannot be separated from our time of prayer. You will be tempted in lent not to read the Bible regularly and not to pray faithfully, because, for us, as for Jesus, the Devil – in the words of 1 Peter – prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in your faith.

AMEN

Father Roger Walker

14.2.16