

THE EMMAUS SERIES

1st Sunday of Lent, Year C

Deuteronomy 26:4-10

Romans 10:8-13

Luke 4:1-13

Man does not live by bread alone

As we begin the journey towards our Easter celebration, today's gospel reading from Luke sets us on our way. For Luke, Jesus' temptations in the wilderness point to the terrible conflict that awaits him at the end of the public life - when "at his appointed time" the devil returns to frustrate the Saviour's work. In Luke's account, the last temptation takes place in Jerusalem – Jesus' final conflict with the forces of evil will take place in the holy city.

A great realism runs through the biblical story. God's final purposes for the human family and for the whole of creation will only be realised through the Saviour's defeat of the forces of evil. We do not need to be persuaded that evil forces are work in our world – selfish abuse of the freedom given to God's creatures; but also the destructiveness caused by the blindness of those who have lost their way in a darkened world. Today's gospel presents the conflict of Jesus with the forces of evil as a very personal one. Perhaps this presentation is a summary of the teaching in which – drawing on the experience of a life shared with us - Jesus warned his disciples of the temptations that would call them away from their commitment to follow him. They will be tempted to give false gods the place the one true God should have in their lives: creature comforts and possessions; power abused for selfish advantage; a "religious" complacency that presumes on God's favours without a genuine commitment to the ways of God.

In the gospel accounts, the temptations of Jesus are closely linked with his baptism by John: "Filled with Holy Spirit, Jesus left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit through the wilderness, being tempted there". In the Jordan he showed that he had thrown in his lot with struggling humanity - "put to the test in exactly the same way as ourselves, apart from sin" (Hebrews 4:15). By his example, and finally through the power of his Paschal Mystery, he would make himself the "Way" to the fullness of life for a lost world. Our reading from Paul to the Romans celebrates this triumphant outcome.

As we reflect upon the conversion to which the Church invites us during our Lenten journey, the Lord's example should be our inspiration. The temptations he faced encourage us to look beyond superficial problems in our lives and characters, and to face up to the root causes of these failings – the false gods that so easily seduce our divided human hearts. Today's liturgy brings us another valuable lesson. The Word of God is a power for good in the lives of those who know and love the Scriptures. The words of Scripture with which Jesus confounds the tempter come from the book of Deuteronomy. Paul cites this same book (30:14) as he proclaims the Church's faith in the risen Lord. This book is one of the high points of the Old Testament. In today's first reading it gives us a summary of Old Testament faith in the God's faithfulness – a faithfulness that is finally expressed in the Paschal Mystery.

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