



# The Anglican Herald

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## Jesus in the Wilderness

### What can we learn from the Temptations of Jesus?

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February 26<sup>th</sup> is Ash Wednesday, the first day of the Season of Lent.

I thought I would share some of my thoughts with you on this subject to perhaps give you something to meditate on during Lent. I think of Lent as a time to concentrate on our Faith and our relationship with God. I hope that what I have to say may be of some help to you.

The first thing we might think of is – **What is Temptation?**

In the **Bible** the word **temptation** primarily denotes a trial in which man has a free choice of being faithful or unfaithful to **God**. It can also be seen as the enticement or seduction to fulfil God given desires in a God forbidden way.

We all have desires in many areas of our lives. God has given us desires to help us live in accordance with His will and purpose for us. We are also tempted to use these desires in ways which please us and we ignore their important and proper place in our lives.

It is not God who tempts us but Satan. St Paul tells us that Satan has authority over the world at this point in time. *Ephesians 6. 10-20* Jesus has defeated Satan but this victory will not take full effect until Jesus returns. We have all been tempted – even Jesus!

God will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able!

*1Corinthians 10. 13*

The biblical account of Jesus' temptations is Matthew 4. 1-11

*Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. <sup>2</sup>And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. <sup>3</sup>And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." <sup>4</sup>But he answered, "It is written,*

***'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'***

Jesus has been driven into the wilderness; He has fasted for forty days and He is hungry. (Some biblical scholars suggest Jesus was close to death due to starvation). The devil suggests that Jesus turn the stones into bread to satisfy his hunger. It seems a very sensible thing to do. The devil wants Jesus to please Himself rather than to please God. This first temptation is seeking to satisfy Jesus' physical appetites as though they were the only things that matter. Jesus tells the devil that living in accordance with the will of God should be the top priority. Fasting is a valuable practice in our lives. The purpose of fasting is not simply that we go without food for a time but rather to focus our mind and thoughts on our relationship with God. There are many references to fasting with prayer in the Bible.

We should note two things here. When the devil said *"If you are..."* he did not doubt who Jesus is. Satan knew perfectly well that Jesus is the Son of God. But Jesus has come among us as the Son of Man and it is to Jesus' humanity that Satan is appealing. Secondly we should note that in responding to the devil's challenges Jesus uses the Word of God. *Deuteronomy 8. 3*

How are your Physical Appetites interfering with your Spiritual life?

<sup>5</sup> *Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple <sup>6</sup>and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you", and "On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone." <sup>7</sup>Jesus said to him, "**Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'**"* Word of God response – *Deuteronomy 6.16 - Psalm 91. 11-12*

This second temptation has to do with Personal Ambitions. I have no doubt that if Jesus had jumped from the temple God would have

sent His angels to save Jesus from death. Jesus came to give us salvation – He did not come to die in the wilderness.

Putting God to the test is in effect trying to do a deal with Him. All of us have or maybe had ambitions for ourselves and I believe God has ambitions for us as well. To achieve ambitions we must make decisions. Whatever decisions we make have consequences. God has promised that if we live in obedience to Him we will be looked after and will ultimately receive eternal life in the courts of heaven. If we choose to follow our own desires we may well find the results are actually harmful to us. We cannot expect God to excuse us from the consequences of decisions we make to satisfy our worldly desires. We do have free will and God allows us to use it however we want but He strongly advises us to choose His plans for our lives.

Personal Ambitions. We cannot make deals with God!

<sup>8</sup> Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. <sup>9</sup> And he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” <sup>10</sup> Then Jesus said to him, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written,

**“You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.”** - Word of God response - Deuteronomy 6. 13

<sup>11</sup> Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

The third temptation has to do with Spiritual Allegiance. The devil has offered Jesus the whole world. We know that in God’s time all things in heaven and earth will be subject to Jesus. Until that time however God has permitted the devil to have authority over the world. This is why Jesus did not challenge the devil’s offer. What Jesus responded to was the condition put on this offer by the devil. Whoever or whatever you worship that is what you will serve. The devil could offer no more to Jesus and yet Jesus proclaims that only the worship of God is acceptable.

This of course is the challenge we face every day of our lives. What or who has top priority when we are making decisions and choices. The things of this world are transient and they pass away. They are of no value in themselves and therefore cannot be relied upon for a permanent future or indeed eternal life. Only God can give us total fulfilment and an assurance of life beyond death.

Following these temptations the devil was defeated and left Jesus. Jesus had withstood the fullness of evil and triumphed.

### **Physical Appetites – Personal Ambitions – Spiritual Allegiance**

These are the challenges that Jesus faced and has defeated. While we can rejoice that the Son of God has defeated Satan we must understand that Satan has not yet been completely vanquished. God continues to allow the devil to have power and authority in this world. We must continue to pray –

*'From all evil and mischief; from sin, from the crafts and assaults of the devil; from thy wrath, and from everlasting damnation,  
**Good Lord, deliver us.'***

When we look at these three areas of temptation we can see that they cover just about every facet of our lives. We continue to be tempted by the devil. He is very active in the world and his main aim is to turn us away from God. Unlike Jesus we very often give in to temptation because we find the things of this world are enjoyable and in many cases easily available.

As Christians we know God has given us what we need to stay close to Him. We have - *the gift of the Holy Spirit; the written word of God in the bible; the power of prayer; the Eucharist and the other sacraments of the Church.*

Jesus prepared for His earthly ministry with Fasting and Prayer. The bible has a number of references to Fasting and all associated with Prayer. Perhaps we could give some thought to this.

May I suggest that during the Season of Lent we make a determined effort to – *Pray more often and Read our bible more often.* Can I also suggest that *on Ash Wednesday and each Wednesday during Lent we set aside at least one hour to spend time alone with God.*

**May you have a holy and blessed Lent**

**For where your treasure is,  
There your heart will be also.**