

THE EMMAUS SERIES

1st Sunday of Lent, Year A

Genesis 2: 7-9; 3: 1-7

Romans 5:12-19

Matthew 4: 1-11

Jesus was led by the Spirit, to be tempted in the wilderness

The lessons of the Scriptures are conveyed, for the most part, through stories. Today's readings bring us two outstanding stories of this kind: the story of the temptation of Adam and Eve, and the story of the temptations of Jesus, the 'New Adam', as he takes up his mission after his baptism in the Jordan.

Writing for his community of Jewish converts, Matthew tells the story of the temptations of Jesus in a way that echoes themes of the traditions familiar to them: his temptation 'in the wilderness' calls to mind the trials that led the people of the Exodus, during their forty years wandering in the desert, to lose their trust in the Lord; like Moses, at Mount Sinai, Jesus fasts for 'forty days'; Jesus finds the strength to overcome his temptations by living according to the words of the Scriptures.

This carefully crafted story refers to more than a single episode in the life of the Saviour. It gives us an insight into the ongoing human experience of Jesus who, in the wonder of the Incarnation, shared our human condition and its struggles – even its temptations, though he was 'without sin' (Heb 4:15). The temptations of Jesus are set forth as an encouragement for us. As we give direction and meaning to our lives, we are tempted to seek security in false gods (Col 3:5): pleasure and possessions; the exercise of power; the achievement of recognition and status. The Saviour's temptations have often been linked with these false securities. As, in his hunger, he rejects the consolation of miraculous food, Jesus encourages us to recognise the empty promise of pleasure and possessions, and to find our security in the truths of our Christian faith. As he turns his back on the earthly triumph many of his contemporaries associated with the coming of Israel's messiah, he invites us to see that a selfish exercise of power over others leads only to bitterness. As he refuses to turn aside from his mission to express the ways of his Father, by becoming involved in the politics of 'the kingdoms of the world', he points out to us the way that leads to the true peace yearned for by the peoples of the world.

In today's second reading – a text much discussed in recent scholarship – St Paul compares the Saviour, whom elsewhere he calls 'the final Adam' (1 Cor 15:45), with the Adam of the Genesis story. The point he wants to make is the incomparable greatness of the Saviour and the blessings he brings in the story of humanity – brought out in a comparison with the Adam figure of the Scriptures. He is not concerned to interpret the complex significance of that figure.

The gospels speak of the temptations of Jesus immediately after his baptism and the Father's words of encouragement as he come from the waters. We may see here a concern in the community that gave us the gospels, to prepare those receiving baptism for the temptations that they will certainly face as they live their lives as disciples of the Lord.

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