

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

St. Luke 4:1-13

Human beings long for the wilderness, the great outdoors, but at the same time, fear being lost out there. The wilderness is only attractive when it can be controlled either by guides or signs or campsites or cabins. When in the midst of the wilderness there is something familiar and something that reminds us that we are in control. But without these familiar things and these things which tell us that we are in charge here, we can panic and become overwhelmed, desperately calling for someone to save us.

Our faith, authentically experienced, is a wilderness. It is like the wilderness or the desert that Moses and the Hebrews had to cross to escape slavery in Egypt to freedom in the promised land. The food and water and shelter that was provided gave them confidence, but when the food ran out and the water dried up and the storms rose, they began to falter and hesitate and doubt God. They doubted so much that they abandoned Him and made a golden calf to worship in His place. They needed to replace the doubt they had in God with something that they had constructed and could control. Their trust in God was replaced by trust in themselves.

Just as the Hebrews spent forty years in the desert so the Lord spent forty days in the desert, and He, too, was tempted to doubt God and place His trust elsewhere. Amidst the hungry days and nights in the desert Satan appears to the Lord and tempts Him to turn stone into bread because why should the Son of God, with all His power, go hungry when He doesn't have to? But the Lord refuses. So amidst the loneliness and isolation of the desert Satan tempts the Lord with power and glory of kingdoms and empires. But the Lord refuses. So amidst this trust in His Father that the Lord has shown Satan tempts Him to test that trust by throwing Himself from the Temple roof. But the Lord refuses.

In Heaven Satan was known as Lucifer, the angel of light who guided the consciences of men. But thrown down into Hell he is Satan, the great deceiver, who still has power to influence our conscience but does so not in the light of God but in the darkness of pride. Satan is the great deceiver because he deceives our minds as he tried to deceive the Lord. But the Lord each time replied with a statement of trust in His Father.

As Adam in the Garden of Eden failed to trust in God and gave in to pride because of the temptations of the serpent, so Christ restores the balance, by rejecting the empty promises of lust and glory and power, and not in a garden of paradise but in the wilderness of the desert. In Adam humanity fell because of a lack of trust, but in Christ humanity is renewed because of trust. But how did the Lord find the courage to resist temptations for food amidst hunger, and glory amidst poverty and power amidst weakness? His courage was not found in negotiating with temptation or in justifying behaviour but with prayer and fasting and with the Word of God, that is Scripture, on His lips.

The Lord did not run away from the wilderness but engaged it, and went deeper into its dark heart because there He would confront Himself and confront sin, and with weapons not of revenge or pride or clever words, but of prayer and fasting and Scripture did He defeat temptation.

Adam was granted paradise but failed to see that all must be for the glory of God and with trust in God and so was banished to the wilderness. Christ was born into the wilderness and lived so that all was for the glory of God and with trust in God and so gained paradise.

Let us pray that through these forty days of Lent we may, for the glory of God, engage the wilderness of the desert of our lives, and with trust in God find that paradise is not found apart from the wilderness but only through it.

Our faith is the way of the Holy Cross. There is no other way.