



COLLECT, READINGS AND REFLECTION
SUNDAY 21 FEBRUARY 2021 – 1st SUNDAY OF LENT

COLLECT

Almighty God,
whose Son Jesus Christ fasted forty days in the wilderness,
and was tempted as we are, yet without sin:
give us grace to discipline ourselves in obedience to your Spirit;
and, as you know our weakness,
so may we know your power to save;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

Psalm 25.1-9

- 1 To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul;
O my God, in you I trust; ♦
let me not be put to shame;
let not my enemies triumph over me.
- 2 Let none who look to you be put to shame, ♦
but let the treacherous be shamed and frustrated.
- 3 Make me to know your ways, O Lord, ♦
and teach me your paths.
- 4 Lead me in your truth and teach me, ♦
for you are the God of my salvation;
for you have I hoped all the day long.
- 5 Remember, Lord, your compassion and love, ♦
for they are from everlasting.
- 6 Remember not the sins of my youth
or my transgressions, ♦
but think on me in your goodness, O Lord,
according to your steadfast love.
- 7 Gracious and upright is the Lord; ♦
therefore shall he teach sinners in the way.

- 8 He will guide the humble in doing right ♦
and teach his way to the lowly.

9 All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth 
to those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.

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Genesis 9.8-17

8 Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, 9 "As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, 10 and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. 11 I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." 12 God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: 13 I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. 14 When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, 15 I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. 16 When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." 17 God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth."

Mark 1.9-15

9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. 11 And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." 12 And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. 13 He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him. 14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

Reflection - this week from Peter

It is odd, isn't it? When Lent comes round, we think of temptation as a bad thing: we make a Lent resolution to give up something and then the rest of Lent is a struggle with the temptation to give in. If we've given up chocolate, then that half bar of chocolate in the kitchen seems to be like a beacon drawing us in; or if we go out to dinner with friends, we find it impossible to resist when they offer one of our favourite chocolates (or we feel ridiculously self-righteous if we manage to refuse - and that seems worse!). If only there were no temptation, we think, then I could be good.

Today we hear St Mark's account of the temptation of Jesus. It is quite different from the versions in Matthew and Luke. It is very short and tells us precisely nothing - except that Jesus was 'tempted by Satan'. But this tiny mention of Jesus being tempted in the wilderness is sandwiched between two huge events: first, Jesus' baptism by John, and then the beginning of Jesus' ministry proclaiming the kingdom of God - "Believe in the good news!" Mark wants us to understand that the temptation in the wilderness is intimately connected to both these events.

In the baptism, Jesus' identity is confirmed: He is the Son of God, "You are my Son, the beloved, with you I am well pleased!" As Bishop Michael reminded us, this is what God says to each of us at our baptism: "You're my girl, and you're all right!" The temptation then looks a bit like our experience of adolescence: it is an inevitable moment, a moment when we have to put that identity to the test. It is a time of discovery, a time to find out whether we are growing into the person we are called to be. Jesus, we know, emerges strengthened and ready for what is to come - and he begins his ministry proclaiming the kingdom. For us, this kind of testing, this experience of temptation, does not just happen once. Key moments in life are nearly always times of temptation, times when it is not always easy to keep a firm grasp of who we most truly are. Moving house, going to college, beginning relationships, ending relationships, facing sudden illness - all these are moments of temptation.

Now, St Mark, I said, tells us precisely nothing. That is not quite accurate. He does say, "he was with the wild beasts, and the angels waited on him." One way of conveying what this means is to say that we are never alone at the most testing moments - it usually does feel as though we are utterly alone. This little verse of scripture reminds us of two important things. First, all creation is interconnected. We are one with everything - weeds, rocks and wild beasts, as well as with other people. And we belong not just to this physical, material world, but to the eternal world of God, where saints and angels sing praise without ceasing.

So, whenever we face this kind of deep testing that has something of Jesus' temptations about it, we begin with the confidence that God has already said to us, "You're mine, and you're all right!"; then we look around and see that we're not alone - there's next door's cat, eyeing up the robin in the garden for a start; and that we are being encouraged and cheered on by saints and angels - so that we can emerge, ready once again to say again, "In God I trust and will not be afraid." (Ps 56.4)

Peter cr