

OPENING 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.**

FIRST READING: Genesis 2.15–17; 3.1–7

¹⁵ The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. ¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, ‘You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.’ ¹ Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, ‘Did God say, “You shall not eat from any tree in the garden”?’ ² The woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; ³ but God said, “You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.”’ ⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not die; ⁵ for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’ ⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. ⁷ Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

Lent is a time for reflection on the way we are living the Christian life: a time for being challenged and encouraged to greater commitment and service. This Sunday, we start by looking at the decision to be a God person. We can decide to walk through life with God or walk in the other direction, without Him. As he started his ministry Jesus faced this decision, in the temptations, and, of course, decided to walk with God. Temptation and making the right decision lie at the heart of the Adam and Eve story also. Human beings, whom Adam and Eve represent, are depicted by the writer of this C.10th narrative as set in the Garden of Eden to enjoy it, and given only one command. They are not to eat of the ‘tree of the knowledge of good and evil’. To know the good and the evil is to know everything, and so is to become god-like. When they eat of the fruit, then A and E, in effect, say that they know as much as God and wish to walk their own way; to take responsibility for their own life and destiny. When you do this, then, as the writer says through the next story, that of Cain and Abel, “sin is lurking at the door” (Gen.4.7). We all have to decide which way to walk!

SECOND READING: Romans 5.12–19

¹² Just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned – ¹³ sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law. ¹⁴ Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come. ¹⁵ But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man’s

In a way, placing this emphasis on our use of the Adam and Eve story (above) does not sit very easily with Paul’s writing in his Epistle to the Romans. Paul seems to speak, simply, about the fall of Adam and Eve from grace, and the subsequent sinfulness of humankind. It is suggested, above, that we have a choice, even if our tendency is to turn our backs on God and so walk along the way that leads away from his

Epistle continued:

trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. ¹⁶ And the free gift is not like the effect of the one man's sin. For the judgement following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. ¹⁷ If, because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so the act of righteousness of one leads to justification and life for all. ¹⁹ For just as by the one person's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

Gospel: Matthew 4.1–11

¹ Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. ³ The tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.' ⁴ But he answered, 'It is written, "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."' ⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, ⁶ '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, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone."' ⁷ Jesus said to him, 'Again it is written, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."' Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour; ⁹ and he said to him, 'All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.' ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, 'Away with you, Satan! for it is written, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him."' ¹¹ Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

Kingdom and fullness of life. Sin tends to rule! This tendency is what is called in Genesis 6.5 'the evil inclination of humanity', which is deep in each of us, and is not eradicated by the flood (Compare Genesis 6.5 with 8.21)! Even when we decide for God, we find it difficult to walk the way of love through life, as God intended. Christ achieved it, in the power of God, and that can give us greater confidence in meeting the temptations, which can distract us from walking his way. Follow the example of Adam and Eve and you will fail. Follow the example of Jesus, however difficult that may seem, and you just might become a useful servant of the living God. Along the way, however, temptations will always come, as they came to Christ! It's up to you which way you walk!

The Temptation story is found in Matthew and in Luke, where there are some slight differences, but only in summary form in Mark. The three temptations all test the dependence of Jesus, the man, on God, the Father. First, does he trust God to 'feed' him? This reminds us of the Israelites being fed in the wilderness, seen by the Deuteronomic writer, in chapter 8, as more than just physical food, as Matthew picks up (verse 4). Secondly, does he trust God to carry him through life; is he borne by angels or not? And, thirdly, is he content to live and work in God's Kingdom, or does he really want the kingdoms of the world and the worldly power and acclaim, which go with that? The fact that Jesus withstands the temptation, where Adam and Eve fail the test, makes all the difference to our understanding of what it means to be fully human. Perhaps the basic question for us, as we enter Lent, is what do you really want and where does your trust really lie? The implications of deciding for God will be discussed in the coming weeks.

Post-Communion Collect

Lord God, you have renewed us with the living bread from heaven; by it you nourish our faith, increase our hope, and strengthen our love: teach us always to hunger for him who is the true and living bread, and enable us to live by every word that proceeds from out of your mouth; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**