

Sermon Lent 1 2016

As we begin our Lent disciplines we hear today of Jesus and his trials in the wilderness, this enables us to begin to see his full humanity and his purity. He resists all the devil's wiles directly following his baptism by John and the anointing of the Holy Spirit and God's words "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased". So we are introduced to the idea of Jesus, as the Son of God, therefore fully deity and a man who is fully human. This complex idea is one that maybe we have to accept without thinking too much as it is too difficult for our comprehension.

Jesus used scripture to counter the devil's temptations, and this is the only offensive weapon offered to us in the letter to the Ephesians as the armour Christians can use. For Jesus to be fully human and to understand us completely, he had to face temptation, just as we do. He also needed to face temptation and resist to undo Adam's work. Adam had been created perfect but gave into temptation and

passed on the consequences to the whole human race. Jesus, by contrast, resisted Satan and by his victory offers salvation to Adam's descendants.

We try to practise self-discipline during Lent partly to emulate Christ's period of trial and also to prepare ourselves for the new life offered to us by the resurrection and new life of Easter Sunday. How is your Lent discipline going? Have you given up or taken up something that does require self-sacrifice? We were reminded in the reading from Isaiah on Ash Wednesday that God doesn't want empty religious rituals, that fasting for fasting's sake isn't what God wants, that it is about more than what we don't eat, but God is pleased when we apply his word to our society, giving kindness, charity, justice and generosity to others; and we are reminded in the reading from Deuteronomy that God's promises are for everyone.

Paul's letter to the Romans also reminds us that God's word is for everyone, but we have to do more than passively believing, we have to

spread the word of our faith. Our God is different from the old gods, he is a living God with whom we have a relationship, who speaks to us, who live within us. Paul, in some ways, cuts through all the complications we make of our faith, all the rites and rituals that we hold so dear, and says: "That if confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord' and believe in your hearts that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

We are not justified by our actions but by God, however if we love God in our hearts we cannot help but act on it. If we are living by his commandments we cannot help but care for our neighbours and our environment, we cannot help but give time to God.

This Lent we are being asked, through self-discipline, to give more to God and to others, not just to fast for fasting's sake, to meditate on our life, our relationship with God. After all every relationship needs some 'special' time, some time away from the demands of the world to be renewed, to be refreshed and to grow. A

chance for intimacy, for quiet, for talking, for crying and for laughing, for new experiences and for fun. A holiday in other words, a collection of 'holy days'. Which doesn't sound much like the dreariness of a Lenten fast but we are told in today's reading from Deuteronomy to give back to God part of his bounty, tell the story of our salvation and then to celebrate.