

Lent 1

The Gospel for the first Sunday of Lent takes us right to the temptation of Jesus in the desert. In Mark's Gospel the account of Jesus' temptation is very concise, with no details in regard to the nature of the temptations. We must look to Matthew and Luke to provide the descriptions of what form the temptations took. Mark says that Jesus was driven out into the desert by the Spirit. Matthew and Luke use a gentler word: "led". The temptations appear to serve like all temptations - as a kind of test. As Jesus is about to embark on his mission as Messiah, will He take short-cuts or will He remain within the Father's will? Will He choose the world's ways to success or rely on the love of His Father? You and I are surrounded by such temptations all the time. It is comforting to know that part of Jesus's mission included undergoing the everyday human experience of temptation. Mark points out that Jesus was with the wild animals (a state of grace, like Adam) and was ministered to by angels, offsetting the demonic activity. A new Adam and a (re)newed creation.

Having passed through this time of testing for forty days, Jesus returns to Galilee. The arrest of John the Baptist is a kind of signal for Jesus. The forerunner of the Messiah completes his ministry. It is now time for the Messiah to begin His work. Jesus announces that the time is accomplished, complete. Centuries of waiting on the part of the Hebrew people is now over. The kingdom of God has arrived in the person of the Son. In some ways we can consider the rightness of this moment from a number of perspectives. In terms of knowledge, the Greek philosophy had sharpened the quest for truth and its divine source. The Greek language provided a rich and expressive way for people to share ideas across many cultures. Roman roads (and armies) provided a kind of safe access that allowed ideas and faith to travel relatively fast from Eurasia all the way to Britain. The old Greco-Roman mythology had ceased to hold peoples' belief as a viable way to make sense of their world and learn how to live a moral life. Jewish faith and scriptures/prophecy had spread throughout the ancient world also, witnessing to a Creator God who is Spirit and who gave rise to an orderly universe without being bound by it's rules. The time was truly ripe.

Into this steps Jesus announcing the arrival of the Kingdom, a new way of being through a spiritual union with Jesus. The message was a simple one that could be grasped by anyone of good will. Repent and believe the Good News. All is forgiven! Rethink your assumptions. Re-examine your priorities and choices in life. And, believe in the Good News. The Good News that the Kingdom of God has arrived in the person of Jesus Christ, a kind of amnesty has been declared. We can risk repentance and live joyfully,

with our consciences clear as Peter wrote. Repentance is not something we can do without God's help. We can be willing to change but only God can give us the grace to do so. We might come to the end of something and be ready for something new but are we willing to receive it? To go against the grain of how we have been living life? That's why Lenten disciplines make sense because they are a kind of practice in going against the grain by some small acts of self-denial.

Jesus is not asking for your vote; He is asking for your heart, your will. Are you ready? Is this a time of fulfillment for you? Is the time ripe? Jesus is saying, "Believe".