

Matthew 4:1-11 Temptation.

In today's Gospel, Jesus is led by the **Spirit** into the desert to be tempted.

This follows immediately after Jesus' **Baptism**, and the two are linked. At his Baptism Jesus heard the voice of God affirming him as '*my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased*'. Now that affirmation is tested by the devil, to see if Jesus really believes it. These temptations would follow Jesus through his ministry, but they are faced head-on at the beginning. It is a question of which way Jesus' life will go, what will concern and occupy him. These fundamental questions also face us, and in Lent we seek to answer them. What do we really want? What do we really care about? Who do we really follow? Jesus spent 40 days and 40 nights in the desert, fasting, praying, meditating on Scripture, listening to his Father, preparing himself for the life and ministry which was ahead of him, and found that he faced various temptations. The Devil says to Jesus, '*If you are the Son of God*'. He tries to put doubt in Jesus mind as to his **identity**, and therefore to tempt him to seek to *prove* his identity. For us, we hear, '*If you were a real Christian you wouldn't say those things, think those things, do those things.*' **'Does God really love you? Surely not you?'** We are tempted to doubt our identity, as loved children of God, and to replace God in our lives, in three ways:

1. v3-4 Materialism

Jesus is tempted to offer people *only* a material solution to their problems. This is the way of the world we live in. People look to science, to Government, to work, to family to provide for all their needs, and neglect their souls and spirits, and the God who created us all. Material needs are important, but not everything. Jesus met these, as when he fed the 5,000, but he was to be more than a great relief worker. He came to do his Father's will, to accomplish his mission, to gain our eternal salvation, forgiveness and renewal as children of God. This was more important. Jesus taught, '*Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*'

There is more to life than our material desires, there is the hunger of our hearts and souls.

We find our deepest fulfilment not in possessions but in doing the will of God.

2. v5-7 Success, spectacular feats and worldly glory.

Jesus is tempted to put on a show, do something spectacular to impress people.

The temptation is ***to please people rather than to please God.***

How often we are tempted to try and make a good impression on others, so that they think well of us, rather than simply getting on with being ourselves, doing God's will.

It is easy to get caught up in seeking achievements for their own sake. Our culture is caught up in the drive towards possessions, material things and status. These can easily become the ultimate values that we pursue in life, which can lead us to sometimes do or say what we know is wrong, because it will impress others, or make us more acceptable to others. ***People's opinions are fickle, but the love of God for us is eternal.***

3. v8-10 Power and compromise.

'All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me', says the Devil.

Jesus resisted **firmly**, '*Away with you, Satan!*' he declared. Jesus later said, '*What does it profit anyone to gain the whole world, and yet lose their soul*'. (Mt 8:36)

There are many ways to get on in life and work, where we are tempted. To lie a little, cheat a little, take what isn't ours, bend the rules, act selfishly, manipulate others, and we may prosper in this world. The Devil whispers, '*Serve me, as well as God. Don't get carried away. Hedge your bets. Serve God, if you must, but don't go too far, hold back a little, look after yourself first.*' Jesus knew ***he could never defeat evil by compromising with it, and neither can we.***

Our temptations come where we are most vulnerable, so we need to know ourselves, our weaknesses and our strengths, and not to play with temptation.

A preacher once said, '*What makes resisting temptation difficult for many people is that they don't want to discourage it completely!*' Compromise is attractive.

Temptation is part and parcel of the Christian life. It is not sinful to be tempted!

The Spirit allowed this to happen to Jesus, so that he had the opportunity to grow strong in his resolve to follow his Father's will, all the way to the cross.

These three temptations are essentially one: to usurp God's place by: material things, or people's opinions, or compromise with the world.

When we are tempted it is an *opportunity to **re-affirm our commitment to follow Jesus.***

But when we do fall into temptation, it doesn't mean we are lost or unloved or can never get it right. All lies that come to our minds. We seek forgiveness and carry on!

May God grant that this Lent we learn to know ourselves better, resist temptation well, and draw closer to our Lord.