

## **First Sunday of Lent (Sunday)**

When our spouse comes home from work, we might ask them how the day went. We hope they say that it went well. But there are times when we might hear that the day has been hard and they feel that they have been really tested. Our children or our grandchildren might sometimes tell us with delight that they passed the tests that they faced at school that day. When things go wrong in our families, we sometimes hear ourselves saying that we have failed the test of being a good mother or a good father. As a son or daughter, we might feel at times that we have failed the test of living up to the expectations and hopes that our parents have for us.

In today's gospel we go out into the wilderness with Jesus to listen and to see how he fared when he was being tested as the Son of God. Matthew is our guide and he helps us to notice what happens in the light of the history of the people of Israel. As Jesus was tested in the wilderness for forty days and nights Matthew wants us to recall how the people of Israel were tested in the desert by God for forty years as they made their way from Egypt to the land God had promised them. God's love for Israel was sealed by a solemn covenant with Moses on Mount Sinai. Israel became God's son and daughter. But so often the child that God loved was not faithful to him.

Jesus was being tested to see what kind of a Son of God he would be. In the first test Jesus is called to turn the stones of the desert into bread. The background to this is the way that God provided Manna for his people in the desert. But they still grumbled. They did not trust that God would care for them and feed them every day. They always wanted something more. Jesus knew his Father's love for him. There was no need for anything more. He had no need to turn stones into bread. He passed the first test as a faithful Son of God.

In the second test he was taken to the edge of the temple, high above the valley below. He is tested by being told to jump off the temple. He had often prayed Psalm 90 that speaks about God sending his angels to look after us and prevent us from getting hurt. Now Jesus was being told to put his trust in God to the test. But unlike the people of Israel in the desert Jesus would not test God's promise of protection. He passed the second test that he was a faithful Son of God.

In the final test Jesus was taken to a very high mountain and told that everything he could see would be given to him if he fell at Satan's feet and worshipped him. Again, quoting from the Book of Deuteronomy "You must worship the Lord your God and Him alone," Jesus expresses his undivided love for his Father. The only

way for Jesus to fulfil his mission was by his faithful service to the will of his Father.

We listen to this reading at the beginning of Lent because we know that we too are tested. The question is asked often, “Are we faithful sons and daughters of God? Do we put our hope and trust completely in the God who loves us? Do we believe that he cares for us and is there for us every day? Are we single-minded in our devotion to Him?”

We will all use different measuring sticks to answer those questions. Our parish motto reminds us that we are a community who are learning to be disciples of Jesus. We are all still learning to recognise the signs of the personal relationship that Jesus has with each one of us so that we can claim that relationship as our own. Our times of prayer during Lent allow Jesus to reveal his relationship of love with us ever more deeply.

Today we have the joy of celebrating the Baptism of Charlie Heinrich. We met her last week and made her welcome. Her parents Alice and Kym bring her to the waters of Baptism to receive the gift of the life of God, a life that will never end. They bring her here because they want her to belong to a Community of Faith that can nourish her and support her and her family.

This First Sunday of Lent is a special day for those we call Catechumens, men and women who have not been baptised but who now feel called to live their relationship with Jesus as members of our Catholic Church. They ask us to pray for them. They ask us to support them as they begin their Lenten journey towards Baptism at Easter. These people have usually been thinking about becoming members of our Church for a long time. At last night’s Mass we prayed for John Cahill.

In today’s society we might wonder why anybody would choose to become a Catholic. Our wounds and weaknesses have been laid bare for all to see. But you and I know that we are not in the Church because we have achieved perfection. We are here because we need to be here. We are here to experience the mercy and forgiveness of God. We are here because Jesus needs us to bring that mercy and forgiveness to others. We celebrate the Eucharist and draw life from the Lord. But at the end of every Eucharist we are sent out to bring life and joy and hope to those we love and to those we share our life with. May Kym and Alice and Charlie find in us the support they need to live their call to be disciples of Jesus.