

First Sunday of Lent

At the beginning of this week, we again heard of someone being lost in the northern arid part of our state. The young man's body was found a few days later. Whenever we venture out into places where nobody lives we face danger. Yet those who choose to spend time in places of wilderness or desert often do so to be tested in one way or another.

There is a sense in Luke's gospel that Jesus chose to go out into the desert knowing that he was going to be tested. We are told that he was full of the Holy Spirit and was led by the Spirit through the wilderness. The context in which Luke places this episode, helps us to understand what kind of a test Jesus faced. At his Baptism Jesus heard his Father say to him, "You are my Son, the beloved; my favour rests on you." Luke then gives a genealogy of Jesus, working backwards in time. It concludes, "son of Enos, son of Seth, son of Adam, son of God." The question that needs to be answered in the desert is, "What kind of a Son of God is Jesus?" Can he be trusted as the one that God has chosen to be his prophet? Only when Jesus has gone through this test can his ministry begin.

Forty days in the wilderness reminds us of the forty years that the people of Israel spent in the desert after they had been freed from slavery in Egypt. Forty years is

a generation, a lifetime. Jesus had taken on our humanity in the fullest possible way. Jesus was tested not just for forty days in the desert but right throughout his life. Luke reminds us often of the forces of evil that were opposing him throughout his ministry. His victory over the evil one was only made clear at his death and Resurrection. This can speak to us of the testing that we experience all throughout our life. We can only be victorious over the forces of evil by our union with Jesus.

When we look at how Jesus was tested, we come to understand that we are tested like that too. Jesus was hungry. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God tell this stone to turn into bread." But Jesus knew that we humans have a much deeper hunger that he was called to satisfy. We have a hunger for God, a hunger to be fed by God's Word, a hunger for meaning in our lives that can only be satisfied by God himself.

Jesus was tested by being offered the power and the glory of all the kingdoms of the world. All he had to do to get all that was to bow down and worship the devil. How often are we tempted to take up power and authority that does not belong to us? How often are we tempted to impose our will upon others rather than listen to their needs and find ways to serve them. Jesus knew that the kingdom of God could only be established upon

earth by his life-giving service of others and teaching his disciples to do the same. Jesus could only be obedient to his heavenly father and be faithful to him. “You must worship the Lord your God and serve him alone.”

The third way in which Jesus was tested was very subtle. He was taken up to Jerusalem and invited to throw himself off the high wall of the temple, trusting that God would save him from any harm. Isn't this what God promised in the psalms? But Jesus knew that trusting in God completely was not the same as forcing God's hand and putting God to the test. How often do you and I want to believe in God on our terms, rather than on God's terms? How often do we bargain with God? How often do we test God by telling God that we will do what he wants us to do if God does what we want him to do for us?

Trusting in God's love and care for us as Jesus trusted in the love his father had for him is never easy. And yet it is at the heart of the faith of all who are called to be disciples of Jesus. Trusting in God and being obedient to God's Word go together. Just as a child learns to trust that what their parents ask of them is an expression of their love for them, so it is with us and God. Learning to be a faithful disciple of Jesus takes a lifetime.

On this weekend throughout the diocese those who are seeking Baptism at Easter are taking part in the rite of Election. That sense of being chosen by God to share in his life through the waters of Baptism is something that we can all be celebrating. How poorer we would be if we had not received the gift of faith.

For those who have been baptised and are coming into full communion with the Catholic Church at Eastertime there is a rite of being presented to the communities that will welcome them at Easter. David Chris and Diane will be presented to our community at 9.00am Mass tomorrow.