

REFLECTIONS FOR THE FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT ~ 24 February 2022

The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale

May the dust of the wilderness hold our footprints
lovingly
shaped as they are by your hurt
for dust remembers
May the journey into wilderness unfold
honestly
for honesty is the gift
your soul recognises as you
May your time in this wilderness
be shaped by space
rather than minutes
so there is time enough for all of you
May the stones in this wilderness
cry out your name loudly
that your spirit recognises the voice
that has been calling you always
And may you know this wilderness
has been expecting you
and you find between the stones
a promise growing



In this poem-prayer from Roddy Hamilton, we find signposts for our Lenten journey. It is a journey knowing that dust remembers, that in honesty our souls recognize who we are, that our wilderness time in Lent is meant to be shaped by space not minutes, that the stones in the wilderness cry out our names, that between the stones we find a promise growing. This is our roadmap for the coming Lenten days – rootedness in earth, trust, honesty, presence, listening to the cry, and hope.

This, too, was how Jesus began his public life, in essence, his Lenten journey. Immediately before the temptations in the wilderness, God confirms to all those gathered that Jesus is God's Son, "my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased" (Matt 3:17). The Spirit of God alights on him (Matt 3:1). Surely, that is enough affirmation and love to set Jesus on his way. But immediately, Jesus doubts. He doubts his own ability, his readiness, to follow the call of the Father even with the presence of the Spirit to guide him.

Jesus' doubting despite God's goodness echoes the doubting by our first parents in the garden, recounted in the first reading in today's Liturgy of the Word. This second creation story shows the world as God intended it to be. God intended humanity to live with God, interacting with God intimately and frequently. God intended us to be good stewards of creation, tilling in the garden, digging our hands in the clay, and following the example of our Creator-God.

All of this is challenged when, in Genesis 3, we read, “the woman took of its fruit and ate; and she



also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked” (Gen 3:6-7). God had created them, given them a place in the garden, entrusted them with the cultivation of the earth, and even walked with them in the cool of the evening. But the woman and her husband saw “that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise” (Gen 3:5).

Some theologians suggest that the reference to their knowing that they were naked is

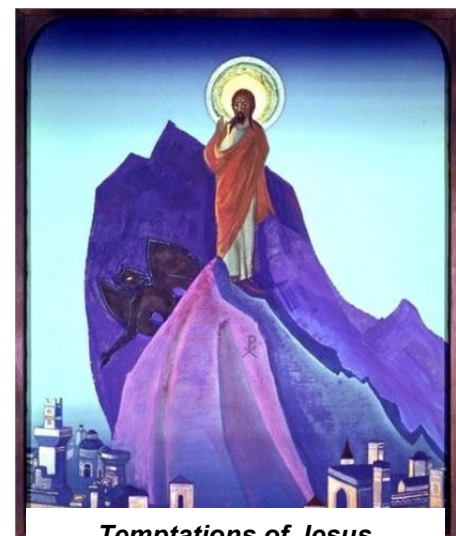
linked to their vulnerability. Before the fall, Adam and Eve were at peace with vulnerability. They accepted the vulnerability of being totally dependent upon God. They were at peace with being physically open and vulnerable. After they have fallen, Adam and Eve refuse to be vulnerable. A call to conversion includes a call to be vulnerable – to open up to each other and to recognize interdependence. The serpent had already told them, “God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Gen 3:4). Therefore, other theologians believe that their sinfulness was in giving in to the temptation to a desire for power, to be self-sufficient, to be radically independent, to be “like God.”

Psalms 51 is a response to that turning away from God, a plea for healing and reconciliation. Its opening words, repeated three times, remind us that our creating God is a merciful God, “Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin” (Ps 51:1-2). In these two verses, three different Hebrew words are used to name God’s mercy: *hanan* (“mercy”), *hesed* (“steadfast love”), and *rahamim* (“abundant mercy”). The psalmist is relentless in making the point – God’s response to our falling away, our sinfulness, even our doubt, is always mercy-filled. The psalmist can cry out with confidence in being heard, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me” (Ps 51:10).

In the Gospel reading from Matthew, Jesus is tempted as we all are and, unlike Adam and Eve, responds to the three temptations with the same confidence that the psalmist shows:

The desire for possessions: “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” But he [Jesus] answered, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God’” (Matt 4:3-4).

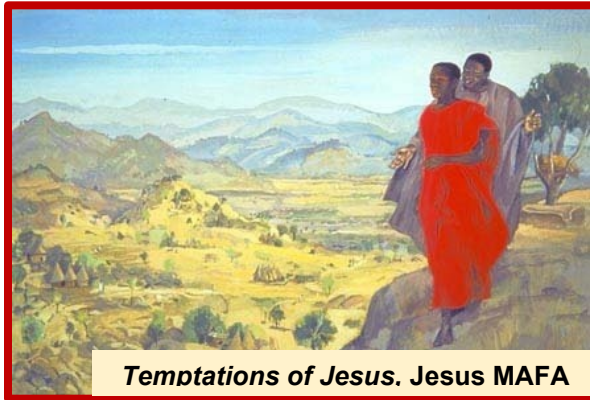
The desire for honour and power: “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you’, and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not



Temptations of Jesus
Nicholas Roerich, Russia

dash your foot against a stone.’ Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test’” (Matt 4:6-7).

Pride and the desire for security: “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! for it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him’” (Matt 4:9-10).



Temptations of Jesus. Jesus MAFA

God’s response in mercy guides our response that we are loved by God. Ron Rolheiser, in commenting on this passage, concludes, “It is good to remember that we are God’s special, blessed sons and daughters, even when our lives seem empty, anonymous, and devoid of any special privileges because then we won’t forever be putting God and our restless hearts to the test, demanding more than ordinary life can give us.” The Lutheran Pastor, David Lose, echoes this conclusion, “Jesus did not die on the cross in order that we might be acceptable or to

make God loving. Rather, Jesus died to show us that God already loves us and has declared that we are not just acceptable but also treasured, priceless beyond measure. . . You are ... enough.”

Karl Rahner says that, in his responses to the devil, “What does Jesus do? He once again abandons, so to speak, his awareness of his divinity and takes his place on the side of the poor, the abandoned, and the weak.” Veronia Lawson rsm adds, “Most people of faith would agree that being son or daughter ‘of God’ right now has more than a little to do with the way we relate to all of Earth’s human and other-than-human inhabitants, the value we ascribe to Earth’s precious resources, and the respect we show for life through our responsible use of those resources. Lent calls us to reject the path of domination or of greed or status or entitlement so that, like Jesus, we may truly be ‘of God.’”

Pope Francis gives us a Lenten invitation, “Let us imagine that we are in a desert. The first feeling would be that of being enveloped by a great silence: no sound besides the wind and our own breathing. The desert is a place of detachment from the din that surrounds us. It is the absence of words to make room for another Word, the Word of God, that caresses our hearts like a light breeze. The desert is a place of life not of death because speaking to the Lord in silence, gives us life again. ...The desert is *the place of the essential*.”



The theologian, Belden Lane, challenges us further, “Why am I drawn to desert and mountain fierceness? What impels me to its unmitigated honesty, its dreadful capacity to strip bare, its long, compelling silence? It’s the frail hope that in finding myself brought to the edge...I may hear a word whispered in its loneliness. The word is ‘love,’ spoken pointedly and undeniably to me. It may have been uttered many times in the past but I’m fully able to hear it only in that silence.”

In a reflection on the passage from Matthew entitled “Mend our Wants,” Steve Garnaas-Holmes reminds us once again that we can be confident in our failings and frailties because we are known and loved by the God who is abundantly merciful and steadfastly loving:

O Steady One, steady me.
I am unbalanced by secret weights of fears,
tugged at by invisible strings of desires,
and I stumble, crash into folks, break things.
I don't act because I'm afraid I can't succeed—
I wish I could turn stones to bread.
I don't love because I'm afraid of getting hurt—
I wish I could jump off cliffs fearlessly.
I cling to things because I'm afraid of being without—
I wish all the world could be mine.
But my wants are wayward, my fears are lies.
The power, the security, the belonging I seem to want
are all in you and you alone.

Touch my desires, Beloved,
and bend them back toward you.
Lay your hand on my hungers and steady me.
Mend my wants with your generous grace,
sweeter than bread with honey.
Heal my fears with your perfect love,
the earth from which I cannot fall.
Calm my anxieties with your steady presence,
for you are the world to which I belong.
You settle me with trust, courage and gratitude,
for I have all I need, abundantly.
You whisper to me gently, *Oh, fretting soul, relax.*
I have you.

In this first week of Lent, may we know that we are “of God,” that we are enough! I am “of God,”
I am enough!

