

## Lent 1 Year B

Genesis 9:8-17

Ps 25: 1-9

1 Peter 3:18-22

Mark 1:9-15

Some years ago we went to the Holy Land. We stayed in Jerusalem and Tiberias. We visited Roman remains and Biblical sites. One of the most lasting images for me is the Judean wilderness – the desert. From Jerusalem to Jericho in the bottom of the Great Rift Valley, the desert road goes down, down, down, down. Sand, sand, sand, sand, dunes, caves. Maybe the occasional lizard. Not much else. Unrelenting sun or penetrating cold.

Christianity is a religion of the desert. Moses led his people through the desert from slavery to the Promised Land. John Baptist came from the desert to make way for the Messiah. Jesus began his work in the desert.

The silence is profound. Nothing comes between man and The Divine. No life thrives here except the inner life. Confront it or go mad.

Listen to the wild beasts that live inside us that incite us to put ourselves at the centre of our lives: to take more than we need, to pile up possessions, to seek approval from others. Confront these beasts.

Listen to the angels that live inside us encouraging us to put the common good – God – at the centre of our lives. Take heed.

I am caught between wild beasts and angels inside me. I do what I wish I didn't and don't do what I wish I did. I am caught between wild beasts and angels outside me. I find myself quite alone in a moral and spiritual wilderness, pulled this way and that by external forces that beguile and suborn me. I suppose I have to face the desert, the barren place, the wilderness, the untamed place, the purgatory through which I must pass to reach that quality of life which is eternal.

"We are not here to play,  
to dream, to drift. We have good work to do,  
and loads to lift. Shun not the struggle.  
Face it. 'Tis God's gift."

Temptation in one form or another is an unavoidable part of life. If we honestly examine our daily experience, we can find many aspects of temptation: impulses or tendencies counter to the right way of doing things. To rationalise away these temptations, so that they become socially acceptable and politically correct—is itself an insidious temptation.

We want to dictate for ourselves what is right and wrong, to draw for ourselves the boundaries of "acceptable" behaviour, unencumbered by any notional commandments of God. This is like Adam demanding to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Our real growth to Christian maturity comes by acknowledging and accepting the vocation of struggling against temptation, to achieve the kind of behaviour and attitudes Jesus expects. We must submit our behaviour to his gospel.

Christ and Adam show the two opposite reactions in face of temptation: Adam, archetype of sinful, evasive, self-seeking humanity, finds plausible reasons to yield to it, and rebels against God's will. Jesus, archetype of the new God-seeking man, resists temptation even repeatedly. It can only be conquered by this blend of patience and loyalty, supported by trust that what God requires of us is what is best for us.