

Lent 1, Year C

February 14, 2016

Luke 4:1-13

After his baptism, Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'"

Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." Jesus answered him, "It is written,

*'Worship the Lord your God,
and serve only him.'"*

Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written,

*'He will command his angels concerning you,
to protect you,'*

and

*'On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"*

Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

[Much of what I share this morning comes from a commentary by David Lose.]

Every year, on the first Sunday in Lent, we read the story of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. Now when we think of temptation, many of us will naturally think of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, and given the fact that immediately preceding today's Gospel lesson Luke traces Jesus' descent from Adam, perhaps **Luke** is thinking of the Garden of Eden as well. If we look at the temptation of Adam and Eve closely, we will see that their temptation had next to nothing to do with a power grab and almost everything to do with insecurity and mistrust. Insecurity and mistrust.

We sometimes refer to the devil as “the great deceiver” and with good reason. But in point of fact it’s not so much the case, at least with Adam and Eve, that the serpent **deceives** as much as the serpent sows *mistrust*. He distorts the commandment of God and plays upon the insecurity of Adam and Eve in order to call into question God’s intentions. *God hasn’t told you everything about the forbidden fruit. So what else has God not told? What else is God withholding?* It is a story of seduction based on mistrust that leads to the dissolution of the relationship between the two humans and God, then between Adam and Eve themselves, and then between them and all creation.

Today’s Gospel story revolves around the same dynamic. The devil attempts to sow in Jesus mistrust: *you may go hungry; you do not have enough; how do you know God is trustworthy?* In each instance of temptation Jesus replies with Scripture. Now, over the years people have made a great deal about that, inviting **us** to respond to life’s challenges by remembering or quoting Bible verses. And while there may be something to that, I wonder if it’s not so much that Jesus quotes Scripture to deflect temptation as it is that Jesus finds *in* Scripture the words to give voice to his trust. Because at the heart of each reply is Jesus’ absolute trust in – and dependence on – God for his identity and future.

There is a crucial link between trust and temptation. To the degree that we **do** trust God for our daily needs, for a sense of purpose, for our identity, the temptations of the world have, frankly, little appeal. But to the degree that we allow our natural insecurity to lead us to *mistrust* God, we are open to the possibility, appeal, and temptation of the proposition that it is all up to us, that God is not able to provide and so we’d better take matters into our *own* hands.

Blaise Pascal, the seventeenth-century French mathematician and philosopher, spoke of the condition of being human as one of having what he called a “God-shaped hole” in one’s heart. He did not see this as a flaw, however, but rather as the *means* by which God keeps us tethered to our life-giving relationship **with** God. Similarly, St. Augustine, the fourth-century African bishop, writes in the first lines of his *Confessions* that God created a restlessness in our hearts that can only be satisfied when we rest in God.

Read in light of these thoughts, the story of Adam and Eve would lead us to understand that *before* there is “original **sin**” there is what we might call “original **insecurity**.” Adam and Eve are tempted to overcome that original insecurity not through their relationship with God but through the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, fruit that in that moment looks to be shaped just like the hole in their heart.

Trust is at the core of our relationship with God and with each other. Trust in God is not always easy, and when it’s missing, temptation is just outside our door. Trust and temptation are linked. For this very reason, I think, we need the support

of the church community to help us to grow in our ability to **trust** and to live out of a sense of abundance and courage rather than scarcity and fear.

Fr. Robert Gallagher, founder of the Church Development Institute, says that one of the principal jobs of the church is to renew its members in our God-given baptismal identity. What is our “baptismal identity”? Right before today’s temptation scene, Jesus was baptized and was affirmed in *his* identity: “You are my son, the Beloved,” the voice from the cloud declared. Our baptismal identity, in its first and simplest sense, is “beloved child of God”. Another way of talking about our baptismal identity is to say that it is our True Self, as opposed to the false or ego self we so often identify with, and live out of; it is our mature Self as opposed to our immature self. St. Paul wrote, “You have died to your false life, and your true life is hidden with Christ in God.” (Colossians 3:3) Our baptismal identity is our genuine life, lived with Christ in God.

And yet, it is so easy for us to *forget* that identity, our **true** identity, and to succumb to our “original insecurity”, to be tempted by all the voices of this world which tell us: “You are only worth something if you are physically attractive.” “Your identity is to be found in whether or not you have been successful.” “Your identity and worth are self-created, not given by God.” “Your primary identity is based on your nationality, or your membership in your political party or some other group.” “Your identity will be bettered if you buy this or that product”. “Your true measure is found only in comparison with others – and right now, that comparison isn’t looking too good.” Those are but some of the temptations that wait just outside the door when we forget our Baptismal identity, when we give in to that “original insecurity”.

Three years ago, two friends of mine were facing imminent unemployment. In one case, the person knew he would lose his job when he reached the mandatory retirement age for workers at the Federal Prison, which is 57. He was not *ready* to retire, either financially or in terms of his desire to keep working. In the case of the other man, who worked for a Federal Government contractor, he had been told that when the Government shut down (the technical term was “sequestration”, there would no longer be Federal funds available to pay his salary.

The temptation for each of these men was to give in to that “original insecurity”, to despair of the future. To start to think that because they may be out of a job, God is somehow untrustworthy, or they themselves will lose their identity and worth. The temptation is to listen to the voice of the serpent telling them that this or that fruit from this or that tree is of the right size and shape to fill the aching hole inside them – that God-shaped hole which *only* God can truly fill. I have been through some similar temptations to “original insecurity” in recent days looking for Serena, my dog, who went missing on Wednesday. I try to keep centered, and trusting in God’s providence.

In what area of *your* life can you trust God totally? In what area of your life are you having a difficult time trusting? Can you identify the temptations waiting outside the door? Has your rootedness in your baptismal identity, your identity as “beloved child of God”, wavered? How can we, as a church family, help you reaffirm that identity – and how can you help fellow members reaffirm *their* baptismal identities?

It’s important, of course, to recognize that temptation is not once and then done. Yes, Jesus rejects the tempter in the wilderness, but he will have other moments of doubt, particularly at Gethsemane and the cross. Similarly, our life as Christians does not completely eliminate doubt, need, or a sense of incompleteness. As heirs of Adam and Eve, we will inevitably fall short in claiming our God-given identity; inevitably succumb, at times, to the temptations outside the door of our original insecurity. At such times it is important to remember that our true identity is not threatened by those temptations. Our life is hidden in God, with Christ Jesus, a fellow descendant of Adam who triumphed, not only at his temptation in the wilderness, but also and more importantly at the cross, committing himself and his destiny to God. The meaning of our baptismal identity is that we are united with Jesus in his victory, and need no longer succumb to original insecurity. One with Christ in his baptism, we receive the same Holy Spirit that he received, and we are affirmed by the voice from the cloud that we, too, are children of God.

AMEN