

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER

The First Sunday in Lent¹

Lessons:

The First Lesson:² Here beginneth the fifty-eighth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.³

“Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew [SHOW] my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins. Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God: they ask of me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God.

“Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours. Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high. Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord? Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?

“Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be thy rereward⁴ [REAR-ward]. Then shalt thou call, and the LORD shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity; And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noon day: And the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of wa-

ter, whose waters fail not. And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in.

“If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson:⁵ Here beginneth the fourth Chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew.⁶

“Then was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith [SETH] unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth [SHOWETH] him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith [SETH] unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith [SETH] Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “Then was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.”⁷ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Homily:

Our lives are so much more than just the simple biological functions of our bodies. While we need food to eat, air to breathe and water to drink, our lives without God are meaningless and empty. That is the essential message of today’s Gospel reading.

Our Lord, who was preparing to begin His ministry on earth, determined to face every temptation, every pain of human existence. So, after His baptism in the River Jordan by John the Baptist, He went into the wilderness to fast and be tempted.

Our Lord did not need to be baptized, as He had no sin. Yet, He submitted to baptism in order to show that He was fully under the law and customs of the Jews. In the same way, He could not be tempted by any human temptation, but nonetheless permitted Himself to be tempted by the devil in order to experience all human temptation. So, after forty days of fasting and wandering in the wild, Jesus was hungry and tired. At His time of greatest weakness, the devil came to Jesus and tested Him.

The temptations presented to Jesus were of three kinds. In the first temptation, the devil proposed to Jesus that He should command stones to be turned to bread, and thus be fed. But Jesus had been sent to the

wilderness by the Father, and to countermand the will of the Father by commanding stones to be changed to bread would be to reject the authority and support of the Father, depending instead on the self.

Jesus rejected this suggestion forthwith, responding that man does not live by bread alone, but instead must rely on the grace, the mercy and the provision of God the Father for life. Indeed, Jesus' reply makes it clear that the very Word of God is sufficient to supply the needs of man: "*It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.*"⁸

But in this response, Jesus did not rely on those things which we could not know, but rather on the already written and known scriptures. "*It is written ...*" He begins, noting that the truth was already available and known to men who followed God. He did not rely for His answer on some special truth not available to men and women in general. This is one of the prime characteristics of Christianity, one of the things that distinguishes it from most other religions: there is no hidden, secret, special "stuff" that is known only to a few insiders. On the contrary, everything important in Christianity is freely available to anyone who is willing to put in the effort to study the Scriptures, the Fathers of the Church, and the Holy Tradition.

The next temptation took the form of testing God. The devil took our Lord to the Holy City of Jerusalem, to the pinnacle of the steeple, and challenged Him to throw Himself down, because God the Father would not let Him be injured, and would instead command angels to bear Him up.

But Jesus would have none of this vain, self-serving and blasphemous challenge, telling Satan that Scripture also carries warnings against tempting God. To do so is to engage in the foolish misconception that one is on the same level with God and can make such bargains with the Father.

Finally, we are told, the devil took Jesus to a high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world, offering our Lord to give

them all to Him if He would worship the devil. This greatest and most deadly of the temptations was also met with flat rejection as Jesus responds that scripture plainly calls on man to worship only the Lord our God, and none other: *“Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.”*⁹

Again relying on known Scripture, in this case the First Commandment, which Moses made known to the people in Exodus: *“I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me.”*¹⁰

Do you notice a common thread that runs through each of these temptations? Each one is an appeal to *pride*, because it encourages the One Who is tempted to assume for Himself control over the divine and natural worlds. And Pride, as we know, is one of the Seven Deadly Sins against which the Church has always warned us.

Once the devil had tried these temptations and had failed, he left Jesus and angels ministered to our Lord. In the temptations, He gave to us a pattern of how we are to respond to temptations in our lives of whatever kind.

Rely always on God. Trust God for your life, your support, your sustenance. Only God can be depended upon for these things. The false claims of the world and the devil, claims of support and care, will leave you hungry, alone and desolate.

We do not need just the bread that the world can give. We need every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

Let us pray.

Dear Lord, as thou wert tempted, so too are we tempted by the things of the world, and by the snares and wiles of the devil. We are often given false promises and empty assurances that can never replace the steadfast rock of thy blessed assurance. Help us to always rely on and remain faithful to thee and thy word in all things, for thy word is life. This we pray in thy name, O blessed Savior and Advocate, who, with the Father and the Holy Ghost livest and reignest ever, one God, world without end. *Amen.*

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The Rev'd Larry Wagoner, MSW¹¹

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¹ This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Holy Communion on the First Sunday in Lent, 2013.

² *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xvi (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

³ Isaiah 58:1-end (KJV).

⁴ *I.e.*, rear guard.

⁵ “Upon any Sunday or Holy Day, the Minister may read the Epistle or the Gospel of the Day in place of the Second Lesson at Morning or Evening Prayer.” *Concerning the Service of the Church*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER viii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

⁶ St. Matthew 4:1-11 (KJV).

⁷ St. Matthew 4:1-4 (KJV).

⁸ St. Matthew 4:4 (KJV).

⁹ St. Matthew 4:10 (KJV).

¹⁰ Exodus 20:2-5 (KJV).

¹¹ Supply Priest, Holy Angels Anglican Mission, Picayune, MS, and Christ Church Anglican Catholic Pro Cathedral Church, Metairie, LA.