

In these first three weeks of Lent, Fr William and I have begun to reflect on Christ's Temptations in the Wilderness – reflections on materialism, with the challenge to change stones into bread, on pride and invulnerability with the second temptation and on the pursuit of power when on the mountain the Devil offered Christ sovereignty over all things if only He would bow down in worship.

And we have tried to ask what the temptations would have meant for His ministry and the character of His Messiahship if He had given into them and how His ministry clearly refuted them. How are His temptations our own?

In the second temptation, in Matthew's ordering of the narrative (Matthew iv, 5 and 6, which differs from Luke's), Jesus is taken to the Temple, His Father's house. Jump down, says the Devil, and if you are really the Son of God the angels will come to rescue you, 'lest you strike your foot against a stone'.

In preparing this homily I have had in front of me the small depiction of this temptation that was painted by Duccio di Buoninsegna between 1308 and 1311. Or rather a photograph of the original, as it is one of the panels on the back of a celebrated altarpiece that was commissioned for the Duomo in Siena and which is still there to this day.

The altarpiece of the Majesty of the Virgin, the so-called *Maestà*, is reckoned the finest surviving altarpiece from mediaeval Italy. It has always been an object of pilgrimage and of veneration, as much by artists as disparate as Michelangelo and the contemporary Sean Scully, as well as by men and women of faith.

The image, as you can see, is damaged at the top of the frame but clearly shows the temple, an octagonal structure, imagined rather like a baptistery in fourteenth century Italy. Following a convention of the period the artist felt obliged to depict the whole of the Temple as it is integral to the story; its architecture fills the whole of the visual field. Cleverly, the wide-open door invites us into a foreshortened view of the Temple's interior with its ornate marble floor of geometric designs. That the temple is made to look so much like a polygonal baptistery also reminds us that we are invited into the House of God by Baptism and that after our Lord's own baptism He was led into the Wilderness by the Spirit. We must follow.

Against the stark white marble panels of the parapet above the devil imperiously points downwards, his long black arm and finger silhouetted against the building. By contrast you can just see that Jesus raises His right hand, pointing Godwards; 'Again it is written, "You shall not tempt the Lord your God".'

Conceitedly, the Devil challenges the Son of God. 'Go for it. Make a call on your Father's promise if you are who you say you are.' Jesus is having none of it.

Was He for a moment even half way tempted to gain equality with God? Of course not.

As St Paul reminded the Philippians, He who was equal with God has no need to grasp at equality but rather took upon himself the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of man and being found in human form humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even death on the cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted Him, giving Him a Name which is above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord, to the glory of the Father (Philippians ii, 6 ff.).

It is in humility that Christ points to the Lordship that is uniquely His.

Pride, the principal of the seven deadly sins, is as much a temptation now as it was for Jesus. To be highly regarded, to be able to command and to commend others, to be seen, acknowledged and recognised. Traits that we know well but which we would do better to put into the service of God and not hold for our own vain self-glorification.

Even more directly, the devil's challenge to Jesus is one that is taken up at Calvary when those around turn out to mock Christ and tease him to come down from the Cross if He really was the Son of God (Luke xxiii, 35).

Even in the face of death Jesus did not bow to temptation because it was in, and through, the humiliation of death, strung up like a common criminal, that He could truly show the world how God judges. Not by outward pomp and vanity, not by being so invulnerable as to become unapproachable, but rather by suffering in our world, for us and with us, that we might be saved.

So, in the second of the temptations we are already intimately confronting the challenge of the cross. That through death life has come, victory has been achieved and we have beheld His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father (John i, 14).

In these days of Lent we should ask ourselves why we try to become invulnerable, what is the root of the pride in us that stops us being as God has made us. Perhaps then we can be loved for who we are and not hide in some fiction of our contrived imaginings.

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