

The Cross as a Symbol of **OUR SIN**
*Jesus' temptation is a reminder of our
struggle with sin*

The Bible is written by people inspired by the Holy Spirit, its message entrusted to people who would be faithful in conveying it to us. Language plays an important part in our understanding of God's word. Language adapts to changes in society and culture, often driven by changes in technology, which is

another of saying, changes in the way we do things; in times of rapid social and cultural change, when language also changes, it becomes necessary to plow through Bible texts and rediscover meaning. This year, at Lent, I invite you on a journey to the cross, through the life of Jesus. The Roman army killed thousands of people on the cross, but only one person is remembered, **by name!** There is something about the cross on which Jesus died, which

gives it power, beyond our understanding.

There is something captivating, alluring, even exciting, when royalty discards its majesty and becomes ordinary and commonplace, like us.

There are many stories about a members of royal families who slip into civilian clothes and mingle with the general population, to obtain first hand information. Years ago, I read about the late King of Jordan, King Hussain who often dressed as a

bedouin and mingled with his people to learn first-hand about their lives.

Remember the film, "*A Royal Night Out*" when on VE Day, Princesses Elisabeth and Margaret slipped out of Buckingham Palace dressed in ordinary military uniform and civvies, respectively? Royalty shed majesty to mingle with common folk.

God's plan that His Son Jesus leave Heaven, shed His majesty and clothe himself as one of us, is the greatest

act of love and compassion human-kind has ever known. While royalty on earth might shed majesty for the sake of high adventure or thrill, Jesus did not do it for the thrill of it; He did it for our benefit.

During His last few hours on earth, Jesus prays, *Father, you gave me authority over everyone. I have given eternal life to each one you gave me,— to know you, the only true God, and (me) the Christ, the one you sent to earth. I brought glory to you here on earth by completing the work you gave*

*me to do. Now, Father, bring me (back) into the glory we shared before the world began.*¹ God's plan of salvation was hatched L-O-N-G before our world began! Jesus says, *I saw satan fall from heaven like lightning*²; perhaps the plan for our salvation began shortly thereafter!

So, Jesus disrobes His majesty and comes as God's Son, to live among us. In the opening lines of His Gospel, John says, *He came and*

¹ John 17:1-3

² Luke 10:18

*pitched His tent among us*³, for the single purpose of revealing the love of God the Father, who recognises our struggle in the face of satan's onslaught, and plans the rescue starting with the arrival of Jesus and thereafter, the work of the Holy Spirit to guide and protect us until God's Kingdom is finally established on this earth, or this earth is "consumed" into God's Kingdom without the speck or shadow of evil.

³ John 1:14 -"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us..."

The Father and I are one⁴, Jesus told His disciples, describing the special and unique relationship He and God the Father enjoyed, but the disciple Philip persisted, "Lord, show us the Father and we will be satisfied". Jesus replied, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and yet you still don't know who I am? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father!⁵

At Jesus' baptism, God affirms Him,
This is my Son in whom I am well

⁴ John 10:30

⁵ John 14:8 & 9

pleased, who brings me great joy.

*Listen to Him and obey Him.*⁶

This special relationship is tested following Jesus' baptism, when the Holy Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by satan. Clearly, this was God's plan, not satan's. God does not *test* anyone and He was certainly not putting Jesus to the test to discover if He would "pass the test". The Father has no doubt that His Son will be victorious over satan's attempts to

⁶ Matthew 3:17 and 17:5 (at Jesus' baptism and His transfiguration, respectively)

discredit Him, and allows for this test to take place. The Father wants to demonstrate to satan, he will not succeed, no matter how much and how hard he tries.

I know we don't like to name him *satan*; we prefer to use a more benign term, *the evil one*, or the *devil*, but we must name and shame him. He is a person, not a force or a spirit. The cross does not make sense unless we name him *satan*, because he is the reason why Jesus left majesty in Heaven and clothed

Himself in humility as humanity, as one of us, to lived among us.

There are two reasons, why the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness.

The first was to meet satan, the one He had come to defeat, and the second reason was to experience first-hand, how satan uses our weakness, to torment us and distract us from Truth.

Matthew tells us, *Jesus fasted for 40 days and forty nights, and He was hungry.*⁷ Fasting is a spiritual

⁷ Matthew 4:2

discipline which focuses our mind on God, and away from ourselves.

Jesus had come to do the will of the Father⁸, and what was to happen was not about Himself, but for the glory of God. I would love to believe Jesus missed the intimate fellowship with the Father, that he denied Himself of food in order to enjoy that special time with Him.

Jesus is hungry having fasted for 40 days and nights. That is when Satan approached Him. Satan will always

⁸ John 4:34 and 6:38

approach us when we are weak, physically, emotionally, socially or spiritually, and his tricks are always the same.

Seen as you are the Son of God, command these stones to become food, and satisfy your hunger!

Every generation of the human race, perhaps more so now, tries to find satisfaction in the physical, here and now. Jesus quotes the word of God, *You cannot satisfy spiritual hunger with temporal, physical food. The only*

nourishment which satisfies, is living in obedience to My Father's will.

Satan first tried this on Adam and Eve. *Don't worry about obedience to God; you are made in the image of God, but if you eat and satisfy your curiosity, you will be **like** God!* Adam and Eve were not curious about God's intentions. There was no doubt in their minds that God has given His best to them, to have and to enjoy. Satan's temptation was to first question God's intention by placing doubt in their minds (*did God*

really say..?), then offer them a lie (*you will surely not die*) in direct contradiction to God's word, and finally tell them they could resolve the conflict in their minds (which Satan placed there in the first place!), through a present, temporal solution within their grasp, "*Eat now...*", nothing will happen! You can be (not **will** be), what I want to be!

Satan's second temptation is again identical to the lie he offered Adam and Eve, "*You will surely not die...*"⁹

⁹ Genesis 3:4

This time, satan quotes God's word in Psalm 91¹⁰ and the spins the lie, *Surely you will not die if you throw yourself down from the pinnacle of the temple, because God's word says He will protect those whom He loves! He will command begins of angels to protect you so that your foot would not touch the ground.* Satan is asking Jesus to jettison practical wisdom and common sense, and expect God to rescue Him from a foolish, self-centred display of God's power!

¹⁰ Psalm 91:11,12

Testing God's love for us, is evidence we do not really trust God.

Jesus replied, "No, my trust in God is perfect; I do not need to do anything heroic to prove it. And I will not test God's word by doing something foolish, at your prompting."

Satan's third and final temptation is as bold as it is brazen. To start, He offers Jesus what is not his to offer. The apostle Paul, a powerful person, before and after his dramatic conversion said, "... *there is no*

*authority (on earth) except that which God has established. All earthy powers of rulers, kings, queens and presidents exist because God has given them authority."*¹¹

Secondly, why would Jesus accept satan's offer of the kingdoms of this world, ruled by people who are self-centred, self-obsessed and self pre-occupied, and at war with each other, when the Father promised His Son a Kingdom, united in peace and righteousness, in visible harmony?¹²

¹¹ Romans 13:1

¹² Isaiah 11:1-9

Jesus quotes God's word for the final time, *"Away from me Satan! (Jesus refers to him by name!) For it is written: **'Worship the LORD your God, and serve Him only.'**"* This is not something satan is willing to do, so he leaves Jesus alone, and waits for an opportune time.

Jesus leaves Heaven, disrobes majesty, and in humility, clothes Himself in humanity, as one of us, subjecting Himself to the temptations of satan.

As we begin this journey towards the cross on which Jesus died, lets take these three lessons:

- First, **acknowledge who is important in your life;** God invites us to live in obedience to His Word. Our physical and temporal needs are taken care of by the one who says, *Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your Heavenly Father feeds them. ... Consider also the lilies of the field, how they grow ... not even Solomon*

*was clothed with the splendour of these flowers ... will not your Father clothe you, O you of little faith?*¹³ If our physical needs are taken care of, should we then not invest our time to build our relationship with the One who has given us life, and invites us to eternal life with Him?

- Second, **trust God's Word**. You should not want God to make a spectacular display of His love for you, in order to have faith in Him, nor should you need to test God's

¹³ Matthew 6:26-31 (extracts)

love for you. We have a tendency to want God to do spectacular things in order to place our trust in Him. "Seeing is Believing" is the maxim of today. If we cannot trust God for simple things of life, which He does and evident all around us, then nothing spectacular will ever satisfy us, like the Grimm's fairy tale about the fisherman's never satisfied wife, who wanted the wish-granting flounder to grant her ever greater greatness!

- Finally, there are no shortcuts or alternative ways to accomplish God's plans. The greatest king who ever lived, Solomon said, "*Here now is my final conclusion: Fear God and obey his commands (i.e. **worship God**), for this is everyone's duty.*¹⁴"

We might think, we can do things **FOR** God which will hasten the arrival of Jesus' as King. It won't! That will happen in God's perfect time. In the meantime, Solomon's

¹⁴ Ecclesiastes 12:13

advice is best heeded, *“worship God, for this is everyone’s duty”*

Our encouragement today is in the prayer Jesus prayed for us in the garden of Gethsemane.

“I pray Father, that they (all of us) will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you, may they be in us, so that the world will believe you sent me.”¹⁵

Jesus knew, if there was one thing which would keep us safe from

¹⁵ John 17:21

satan's temptations, it would be the relationship with God our Father, that we would be one with Him.

Let's pray

AMEN