

Making the connection

On Wednesday last, we listened amid the dust and ash to a gospel that spoke of deeds that needed to be done. Deeds which when done with justice and humility direct our lives towards a type of living which stands in stark contrast to one that might otherwise be on offer. Today on this the first Sunday of Lent, the allure of that other life makes its pitch for our attention, and we have to be alert and capable of making the connection between what we heard last Wednesday and what we hear this Sunday in order to understand how to refute it.

In the three testings of Jesus, our own humanity is confronted once again with the fundamental question of purpose and meaning. What is at the heart of my life? Is it simply to live out my ambition by ignoring the needs and rights of others? To use the resources I have and can attain in order to secure my own advancement? The devil makes it all sound so attractive. *Just turn these stones into loaves... throw yourself down from the parapet of the temple...all this wealth can be yours.* It is as if we are being told: yes you can have it all, so long as you're prepared to be as manipulative as you can be, because let's face it you're invincible, nothing can harm you, the world's your oyster.

Of course such an attitude to life misses out something vital. It's a life yes; but it's a life that is void of any relationship with God or with anyone else, because there is no room in that life for anyone but self and as a consequence such a life will contort you and make you a prisoner. It will narrow you down and confine you. Such a life will freeze your heart and soul and leave you chained to a way of living that excludes compassion and love and replaces them with callousness and cynicism. And this is where our Ash Wednesday gospel meets our first Sunday of Lent gospel.

We are told that Jesus *was led by the Spirit* and that he *fasted for forty days*. Already we are alerted to the twin deeds of prayer and fasting as a means of opening ourselves up to receive the spirit of God. Our fasting must engineer in our hearts the space required for the other person. The fasting which we do in secret (in the wilderness) helps us to establish just such a space. Thus created, we are freed from the prison which our selfishness has built around us, and are enabled to forge relationships. Our fasting far from diminishing us, will release us from the restrictive ties that bind us to our egotism, allowing us to begin a conversation with God. Through prayer we speak and listen to the God who loves us, recognising the vast horizons which are now opened up for us.

Finally Jesus is led to the mountain top and sees from there not a world that is 'there for the taking', but a world which is in need of his gift of love, and the deeds of Lent are made complete out of the acts which are the fruit of that love. Our giving and receiving of gifts is the combination of our fasting and prayer made evident in our work in which the *self* is subsumed and the *other* made paramount. As we go through our Lenten journey let us make this our goal, that we acknowledge our faults and look to put our lives on a path that will open us out into a renewed relationship with God and with each other. That we share our gifts to the fullest in the freedom and joy of knowing we are loved.

Have a good and holy Lent