

TRINITY NEWS

Lent I Mind-Refreshing Texts and Torments in the Desert

The texts used by Jesus during his temptations in the wilderness mirror the voice of God for him. He probably repeated these texts and others to himself from time to time as mantras that sustained his own inner world. A "mantra" is only a repeated saying. We all need such mantras to reassure and reinvigorate us in some of our unexplainable moments of anxiety. Biblical mantras have always been used by Christians as reminders of the presence and love of God. Memorizing biblical texts is a sound spiritual discipline. They are used in other religions but we have our own and so did the Jews before us.

Three Temptations and Three statements

1. The Shatan: "If you are the son of God, command this stone to become bread."

Jesus: "It is written, 'one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God'" (Deuteronomy 8:3).

Jesus is in a weakened state when he is tested after a fast of 40 days. It is a round figure, 40, and it may well apply to all of Jesus' life. He was tested long before he came to the wilderness of Judaea as it rolled out in the dust-film towards Jericho. From his first consolidated perceptions to his last agony he was under pressure to be other than what those perceptions told him. The Shatan knows the Scriptures but he does not use them to speak for God. He uses them as weapons.

2. "Then the devil led him up a high mountain 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 will give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." This may be based on Job 1:6-12 where the Shatan is given authority over the property and people of Job but not his life. Jesus is also stripped of all that he has in the wilderness. The root delusions of rage and aggression, depression and anxiety are heaped

upon him. But he rejects mistaken and ignorant views of God and esteemed earthly realities in the desert as he does at the Cross. He knows that nothing is permanent and that God prevails ultimately over evil. The response of Jesus says all of this: "Worship the Lord your God and serve only him" (Deuteronomy 6:13;10:20).

3. "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'" (Psalm 91:11, 12). The devil quotes Scripture, tormenting the famished Christ. It is false comfort from the father of lies who does not want to protect Jesus or to save him from harm.

Jesus responds again from Scripture. It is a terrible warning to the Devil, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test" (Deuteronomy 6:16). Now the Shatan (Devil, Satan) is exhausted and he slinks away. But he will never let up on Jesus until the ultimate drama of light versus darkness at the Cross.

Three attacks: Three biblical mantras.

All the root delusions of humanity and a wide range of cognitive distortions are brought into play here, particularly all-or-nothing thinking, "you should do this" statements, the discounting of positive thinking, jumping to conclusions, emotional reasoning and using labels to falsely define people and situations.

This desert drama highlights so much that misleads us all. The one who was tested comes out of the desert like Moses to lead the people onwards with clarity in the light of God. There was no burning bush for Jesus as there was for Moses, but there was another hill called Calvary where light prevailed over darkness. He was tested in every way as we are, but he did not give way and his overcoming is imparted to all of us as a free gift already paid for in full. He calls us on with an encouraging wave!

Bishop Arthur Jones

THIS WEEK:**MONDAY.**

- Finance committee mtg., 5:30 p.m., Parish Office
- Vestry meeting, 6:30 p.m., Parish Office

WEDNESDAY.

- Bible Study, 10 a.m.
- Group Discussion, 7:30 p.m., Parish Office

THURSDAY.

- Midweek Eucharist, 10:00 a.m., Chapel

NEXT SUNDAY'S READINGS:

Genesis 15:1-12,17-18; Psalm 27; Philippians 3:17-4:1; Luke 13:31-25

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