

Lent 1C

The term 'bible bashers' is sometime used on people who never let up on quoting the Bible to prove their right, often putting you down at the same time. You can stop them in their tracks by telling them: 'even the Devil can quote Scripture'. That's precisely what he did today. He quotes Psalm 91 out of context, inviting Jesus to do something reckless by throwing himself off the parapet of the temple where the angels would protect him. Yes, we have angels to guard us but not if we do something rash or foolish.

Jesus is in the desert for 40 days pondering how best he can fulfil the role of Messiah when he starts His ministry among the people. And surely an excellent way to win people over would be to do something spectacular, like throwing himself off the temple parapet, as the Devil suggests, quoting Scripture at the same time to masquerade his deviousness.

What a perfect publicity stunt! Who could fail to believe in him after that? Here the devil is tempting Jesus to do something which looks like an act of total trust in God, jumping off the parapet, but which in the cold light of day is lunacy. Had Jesus jumped from the roof of the temple, he would have killed himself. There was no heavenly rescuer on Calvary, why should there be one here?

Some Christians are always chasing after the remarkable, the sensational, whereas God is to be found in the ordinary. They give the impression that God can wave a magic wand and 'send rain from a perfectly blue sky'. That is the substance of the Devil's second temptation - 'putting the Lord to the test'. Among the crowds which often accompanied Jesus in his travels, there must have been many people following him for egotistical reasons. Jesus once told the crowd that they were only following him because of the loaves he multiplied for them when they were hungry. So long as Jesus was

performing miracles they would stick around, but they had no real interest in spiritual growth, only in the spectacular. When the initial excitement of the miracles wore off, they were no longer interested. The fact that Jesus so often tells people to keep quiet about his miracles would seem to suggest that he was continually living with the consequences of having resisted this second temptation.

Yes, Jesus did perform miracles but only to lead people to a deeper faith in Him. The devil in the second temptation is challenging Jesus to prove his credentials by jumping off the temple believing he'll be held up by the angels, but paradoxically if a Messiah needs to prove himself, he is not the true Messiah. The real thing needs no advertising, no publicity. When we're genuine we don't need to go around proving it. It will shine through us.

Performing a spectacular stunt, being a kind of superman, would imply Jesus was immune to human vulnerabilities. This would mean that He did not fully share our human nature whereas St Paul tells us that Jesus 'did not cling to his equality with God but emptied himself becoming like us in all things but sin'.

No, there would be no 'jumping of the temple', no publicity stunts for Jesus with which to dazzle the crowd. As was His Father's will, it would be the arduous road of the cross or nothing. For Him, and indeed us, its the only road to glory.