

Lent 1B

The Scripture today tells us that the Holy Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness. When it uses the word 'drove' it suggests to me that the wilderness wasn't exactly the most desirable of places to be. The desert was a time of testing for Jesus to prepare Him for stiffer tests ahead.

It was precisely when He was at his weakest and most vulnerable that Satan tries out a few choice temptations on Him. The same is true for us. When we are often at our most vulnerable He will try and entice us away from the path which leads to life. He knows our 'Achilles heel' better than we do ourselves. But, with God's grace, if we survive the attack like Jesus did, we'll be all the stronger next time round.

We voluntarily do penance during Lent in order to build up our resistance to things we find most alluring. The Church talks about 'the concupiscence of the flesh'. It's part of the residue of original sin which we've all inherited from the sin of Adam. It goes with our fallen nature. We find forbidden things attractive. We hear a lot these days about the abuse of power at the hands of powerful individuals in Hollywood, with cases of harassment and assault going back decades. The concupiscence of the flesh might have something to do with it.

But it doesn't just apply to Hollywood – we're all tainted with it, young and old. I think teachers of PSHE in secondary schools need to be especially aware of these things and perish the thought that education on its own will keep the young on the 'straight and narrow'. In fact it may even have the opposite effect and inflame their passions even more. The following is a quote from the catechism: *"Man has a wounded nature inclined towards evil. A denial of this fact can only lead to serious errors in education, politics, social action and morals (CCC 407)".*

Traditionally the church has taught that there are three triggers for temptation, the world, the flesh and, of course, the Devil. The Evil One is behind all temptation but the raw material is the worldly power, status and pleasure. There is nothing wrong with the world or the flesh per se, but when we become too immersed in worldly concerns or hooked on carnal pleasures, we become more inclined to use other people for our own advantage rather than loving them for their own sake.

Satan also uses the flesh to ensnare us. The satisfaction of bodily appetites takes precedence. When couples side-step the sacrament of marriage, for instance, they are leaving themselves more open to a self-indulgent life-style which St Paul says is the opposite of what the Holy Spirit wants. Jesus and his mother Mary were invited to the marriage at Cana. As we know things went a bit haywire at the wedding feast but Jesus came to the rescue. If, by sidestepping the sacrament of marriage, couples leave him and his mother out of the equation, who is there to come to their rescue when problems arise in their relationship.

This side of the grave there will always be temptations but Easter proclaims that Jesus has achieved the victory over the powers of darkness the origin of all our woes. By virtue of our baptism into Christ, which we renew at Easter, we are destined to share eternally in His victory.