

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. During Lent we join Him as it were in the Desert so that we too can see through and resist the subtle temptations of the Evil One.

It was precisely when He was at his weakest and most vulnerable after 40 days fasting that Satan tries out a few choice temptations on Him. The same is true for us. When we are often at our most fragile He will try and entice us away from the straight and narrow path which leads to life. He knows our 'Achilles heel' better than we do ourselves. But, with God's grace, we can survive the ordeal as Jesus did.

We voluntarily practice self-denial during Lent in order to build up our resistance to sin. The Church talks about 'the concupiscence of the flesh'. It's part of the residue of original sin which we've all inherited from Adam and Eve. Basically our wounded nature finds forbidden things attractive. We hear a lot these days about the 'me too' movement. The concupiscence of the flesh is the root cause of why people are taken advantage of in this way.

But it doesn't just apply to Hollywood stars and the like – we're all tainted with it, young and old. I think teachers of PSHE in secondary schools need to be especially aware of this and perish the thought that relationship education on its own will see off temptation. It won't. In fact it may even have the opposite effect and inflame concupiscence even more. The following is a quote from the catholic 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 to temptation, the world, the flesh and the Devil.

There is nothing wrong with the world or the flesh per se but because of our wounded nature, indulging in worldly and carnal pursuits of a sinful nature can take over our lives. But Lent is a time for calling a halt to this by means of penance and prayer.

When couples by-pass the sacrament of marriage, for instance, are they not leaving themselves more exposed to temptation. Jesus and his mother Mary were invited to the marriage at Cana. As we know things went a bit haywire at the wedding breakfast when they ran out of wine but Jesus came to the couples rescue at the behest of his mother who said to those in charge 'do whatever He tells you'. When couples sidestep the sacrament of marriage they're not doing what he tells them to and when problems arise, as they did at Cana, who or what will they turn to for respite.

Temptation is here to stay but Easter proclaims that Jesus has achieved the victory over the powers of darkness the origin of all our miseries. By resisting temptation with His help we draw on that victory.