

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. Psalm 91 says "the angels will bear you up, so that you don't hit the ground with a bang and kill yourself". Yes, we have angels to guard us but not if we're rash and irresponsible.

Jesus is in the desert for 40 days wrestling with how best to be the Saviour of the world. And surely an excellent way to win people over is to do something spectacular, 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 inviting Jesus to confuse two things: 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 spectacular, the sensational, whereas God is to be found in the ordinary. They give the impression that if you pray hard enough, God can 'send rain from a 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 dubious reasons. So long as Jesus was performing miracles they would stay around, but they had no real interest in spiritual growth, only in the spectacular. The fact that Jesus so often

tells people to keep quiet about miracles done on their behalf would suggest that he was continually living with the consequences of having overcome this second temptation.

Yes, Jesus did perform miracles but only to lead people to a deeper faith in Him. When the initial excitement of the miracles wore off on a number of people, they were no longer interested. The devil in the second temptation is challenging Jesus to prove his credentials, 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 also suggest that 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 being like us in all things but sin'.

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