

Lent 1C

The term 'bible bashers' is sometime used of people who are forever quoting verses in the bible, mostly out of context to prove their point. Their overconfidence can often be off-putting. 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, inviting Jesus to do something reckless by throwing himself off the parapet of the temple. Psalm 91 says "he will put his angels in charge of you to guard you". But Psalm 91 never mentions 'throwing oneself off the roof of the temple'. The Devil added that to confuse Jesus but he picked the wrong man. Yes, we have angels to guard us but not if we do something bordering on the reckless.

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

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. This was putting God to the test. 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'. Many people who followed Jesus did so solely because of his miraculous powers. So long as Jesus was enthralling the crowd by 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 miracles done on their behalf would suggest that he was continually living with the consequences of having turned down 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, playing the 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 with which to dazzle the crowd. In line with His Father's will, it would be the arduous road of the cross or nothing. For him and for us it's the only straight and narrow road which leads to glory.