

Reflection for the First Sunday of Lent

“Then Jesus said to him, Be gone, Satan!” Today’s gospel presents the battle of wills between Jesus and “*the devil*” as an encounter between two individuals, “*the devil*” having some bodily form. In the story of Adam and Eve set in the garden of Eden “*the devil*” is identified as “*a serpent*”. The idea of a serpent or devil travelling the world looking for victims to lure into sin may be implausible to our logical, scientific reason but there is undoubtedly some force, some attraction, some weakness within us which enables us to conceive evil in our hearts and carry it out. We struggle with the words and concepts but where does anger, hatred, prejudice, greed, bullying, sexual exploitation and such-like come from?

It may not be fashionable these days to talk about sin, or the force of evil, or the work of the devil, but there is no escaping the consequences of these things in our midst, indeed in our own lives. We struggle to find the right language to use in order to describe and discuss these things and this has been the case throughout history. Perhaps the biblical language and imagery express these things in as good a way as any. The story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and the story of Jesus in the wilderness both deal with mankind’s struggle with sin and evil. They end, however, in very different ways. Jesus shows tremendous resolve in the face of temptation and dismisses it with the command to “*Be gone, Satan!*” refusing to put “*the Lord your God to the test*”. Adam and Eve, on the other hand, let the temptation get the better of them. Even though God has spelt out the dire consequences of eating “*of the fruit of the tree in the midst of the garden*” when he said, “*you shall not eat it, neither shall you touch it, lest you die*”, nevertheless, they disobey God.

In our second reading St Paul reflects on the consequences of these two different responses. He describes how through the disobedience of Adam “*sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin*” which “*spread to all men because all sinned.*” Then he contrasts this with the obedience of Jesus when he says, “*as one trespass led to the condemnation of all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men*”. Jesus, not Adam and Eve, is being held up for us as an example.

At the end of Lent, on Easter Sunday, we will renew the promises made at our baptism: Do you reject Satan? And all his works? And all his empty promises? The season of Lent is a good opportunity to examine our own relationship with the attraction and lure of sin and the grip it might have on our life. It is a good opportunity to do battle to break that grip of sin upon us and with Jesus to cry out, “*Be gone, Satan!*”