

1st Sunday Lent – Matthew 4:1-11

In his infancy story, Jesus re-lived the history of Israel in Egypt, “Out of Egypt I called my son.” In the Temptation story, Matthew makes him repeat Israel’s desert experience. Whereas Israel murmured against God and Moses, Jesus remained faithful despite all the temptations that Satan put before him.

After a fast of forty days and nights, the same period that Moses spent on the mountain with God, Satan came to Jesus to test the *Sonship proclaimed at his Baptism*. He made reasonable suggestions. Surely the Son of God did not have to go hungry. Peter would later tell him that the Messiah did not have to suffer and die. The rulers of Israel would tell him to come down from the cross. All such suggestions he rejected. He did not live by bread alone but by *doing the will of the Father*.

To find Satan in the wilderness was hardly a surprise, but to find him in the *Holy City*, speaking a Psalm, was another matter. He was disguising himself as an *angel of light*. Jesus again repelled the tempter and his temptation to throw himself off the Temple, by quoting Deuteronomy. Those faithful to God do not force him to rescue them from their folly.

And the third temptation, Moses viewed the Promised land from Mount Nebo before his death. Satan now showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and told him that they could be his. By the end of the gospel, they were his, but not because he worshipped Satan. He accepted the Father’s will in drinking the cup of Calvary. The devil is dismissed; the angels, God’s representatives, ministered to Jesus.

Today’s passage of the Temptations of Jesus brings us closer to a better understanding of Jesus’ relationship with his Heavenly Father. The devil tempts Jesus to use a cheap trick by turning stones into bread to prove he is the Son of God. At his baptism, Jesus is proclaimed the “Beloved Son” because his relationship with the Father is based on love and not on blind obedience and doesn’t need to be proved or tested. Lent is a time of ***fasting***, to remind us that as humans we are controlled by our passions and appetites until we control ***them***.

Jesus’ obedience is out of love. Dianne Bergant explains it from the short verse in Psalm 51: *Have mercy on me, God, in accord with your **merciful love**: in your abundant **compassion**, blot out my transgressions.*

This love, *hesed* in Hebrew, is a love that insists "...there is nothing you can do that will make me stop loving you," and therefore need no proof. Compassion, *rahamin* in Hebrew, "...comes from the word for 'womb' suggesting womb-love, a strong feminine image underscoring the intimate love a woman has for the child of her womb...This *love* and *compassion* are characteristics of God's attachment to us; they do not refer to any sentiment we might have toward God...and reminds us that *the love and mercy of God are incomprehensible.*"

It is this *love*, *hesed*, that Jesus feels towards the Father and is shown in the intimate word he uses in the prayer, The Our Father, **Abba**, Daddy in Hebrew. Grammatically the word takes the feminine ending (and not surprising, the word translated into Latin also takes the feminine grammatical ending). Not only is Lent a time of fasting but a time for **prayer** so that our relationship with the Father approaches the intimate level that Jesus had with his Heavenly Father, "...where he went off to a deserted place to pray in private," as Luke's gospel tells us.

And lastly, **Alms giving**, that is, remembering our brothers and sisters who need our help to live a better life, makes this relationship with God Trinitarian. Jesus reminds us in the two great commandments that he has given us, **to love God and our neighbor as our self**. This love of neighbor completes the triangle of love: God, ourselves, and our neighbor. Alms isn't so much as handing out aid but invites us to kiss the hand stretched out to us, as Saint Francis did to the lepers on the road who begged him for alms. Jesus models this love when he washes the disciples' feet, a service usually done by servants or the wife for her husband.