



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time-Year C-January 27th 2019

***Readings: Nehemiah 8: 2-6, 8-10, Psalm 18, 1 Corinthians 12: 12-30,
Luke 1: 1-4, 4: 14-21***

At the risk of trespassing on Lenten themes I want to go back behind this morning's Gospel account in which Jesus ships up at His hometown 'church' and begins His public ministry.

We are told that He returns to the Galilee, filled with the Spirit. He has just emerged, of course, from the gruelling encounter and testing in the Wilderness. Those of you, as long or longer in the tooth than me will remember the controversial Dennis Potter TV play, 'The Son of Man' in which the Jesus character writhed around in the burning sands questioning Himself and God repeatedly, 'Is it me? Is it me? Is it me?' It was a distressing and to some offensive scene but it was an attempt to encapsulate the full rigour of the test of Jesus' humanity – without which He cannot truly represent us. In the desert, in the baking, lonely aridity of the waste places, the location of loneliness, that vocation is tested and finally forged. It will carry Him through to the sacrifice of the Calvary. It is a not unfamiliar pattern of the trials of vocation- the question, the trial, the aching solitary, the fear of hubris and of error – the counterbalance of cowardice or infidelity. Is it me? What would you have me do Lord?

But the trial of vocation not only encompasses that lonely struggle for truth and confirmation. It also encounters the work of the enemy. In the Wilderness, which is both a geographical reality and an unavoidable part of the spiritual pilgrimage, Christ has come face to face with the commander of the rebel forces whose rejection of God and suborning of His creature, Man, has necessitated the salvation of Fallen Man. We need not think that His Satanic Majesty will leave the Faithful alone. (Look at the havoc he has wrought in our Church in our time) Many modern people pooh pooh the very existence of this creature. Yet the Scripture attests his reality. I am always puzzled by the rejection of this truth.

To sceptical enquirers I reply that there are very few days that go by in the life of a shepherd when he is not aware of the prowling wolf. Few weeks when the watchman on the guardtower does not see the smoke of the enemy camp. Few respites for the outriders of the border patrols from the harrying incursions of his guerrilla bands.

The reason most people don't cotton on is because, to be frank, the Devil is not terribly interested in the spiritually inert or those who have rejected God positively or by default. He's got them anyway. Start to do something for God or set out on the Pilgrim Way and he will be all over you like a rash.

Most people assume that we believe in the reality of some leering red creature with horns and a tail. How easy that would be to detect. How simple to point out and warn off. In my experience the Arch Enemy of Man bears more relation to his portrait in the old Rolling Stones' song, 'Sympathy for the Devil'. May I remind you – sing along if you must.....
'Please allow me to introduce myself I'm a man of wealth and taste I've been around for long, long years, laid many a man's soul to waste I was 'round when Jesus Christ Had his moment of doubt and pain Made damn

sure that Pilate Washed his hands and sealed his fate Pleased to meet you Hope you guess my name But what's puzzling you Is the nature of my game'

In short he is utterly charming and plausible. His agenda and endgame is disguised by, what appears to be, sweet reasonableness. Christ in the wilderness is offered the chance to feed Himself by turning the stones into bread. His rejection of the self serving abuse of power enables Him to become Bread of Life for the world.

Christ is offered a shortcut to world domination. The Arch Enemy offers Him, from the mountaintop, the power to control the world – subject to bowing the knee to the Enemy of Man. Rejecting this false and destructive shortcut to power and oblivion, Christ is able, from the little hilltop of Calvary, to restore the destiny of Man by love and service on earth and the overthrow of the jailer of mankind in the realms of sin and death.

Christ is promised an easy landing if He will test the sovereignty of God. He prefers the self abandonment to divine providence on the Cross to the giddy flights of fallen angels. The authority of God is the only one to be trusted.

It is in the wake of these momentous encounters with the self, with the Enemy and with the overarching sovereignty of God, that Jesus returns home, victorious in round one of the salvation struggle of His public ministry and, filled with the Spirit, begins to preach and teach in his hometown. As we will see in subsequent weeks, with mixed results.

What we need to identify from all this is the depth of preparation needed for the struggle, the reality of the spiritual warfare in which we are engaged and the need for constant discernment of the truth amongst the tempting array of plausible, charming distractions proffered

by the one who definitely does not have our best interests at heart, the ruler of an empire of slaves.

We follow the Anointed One who has been sent to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to the captives, give sight to those who cannot see, to set the downtrodden free and proclaim the year of the Lord's favour, the liberator of Man and the restorer of our eternal destiny