

Lent 1 – 2026 Year A

Genesis 2:7-9, 3:1-7; Ps 50: 3-6, Romans 5:12-19; Matthew 4:1-11

Very often, we see any limitation imposed on our actions as a curtailment of our freedom, - or our 'rights' or our 'autonomy' - as a cruel limitation to be what - in our eyes - it means to be fully human. We want to hold our decisions in our own hands and not let it rest in anybody else's, let alone God's. This desire creates resentment in us and the desire to erase Him from our lives, so that we can stand our own two feet, no matter what the consequences. We say that we are pursuing happiness, but the consequence is a 'broken world', because that is not how we were designed. We are trying desperately to operate outside who we are so that we can be like God on our own terms. Our yearning, even when we achieve them, so often leaves us feeling dissatisfied, alienated and empty.

When we listen to the reading from Genesis this is the story we are hearing, the story of our own urge to be like God, to make ourselves in whatever image we think we want:

'The woman saw that the tree was good to eat and pleasing to the eye, and that it was desirable for the knowledge that it could give.'

The knowledge that the tree gives is not wisdom. Nor it is not the gift of understanding, awareness, or happiness or joy. The knowledge the tree gives is the capacity to gain experience, to do something simply because you can. The story of Adam and Eve is not a story about how the world was created, it the story of how we have embarked on a course of life that puts God to one side and the damage that has caused, and continues to cause.

'Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they realised that they were naked.'

Here nakedness is no longer the innocent nakedness of when they were first created: it is the nakedness of lust and shame. It is a very modern story if you have eyes to see and ears to hear. It is the story of 'Why the world is broken.'

Matthew's Gospel takes us to the temptation of Christ at the end of his forty days in the wilderness. Notice that Jesus was 'led by the Spirit' to be tempted. This is to say, Jesus *purposefully* allows himself to be weakened by thirst, hunger and the elements so that the Devil will come to him. He places himself in our position. And the Devil does come to him. The Devil does not come to Jesus in public - in fact he is still in the wilderness – there are no crowds to feed, no one to impress, no one to bear witness. Temptation comes like a personal relationship: the Devil to Jesus.

I am reasonably often told by people who are house-bound that they don't sin much because they don't get out too often, and therefore they haven't the opportunity to do so. I wonder if this is true. I think that I am sufficiently acquainted with the nature of sin to know that we humans do not need to go out and about town to meet temptation; temptation will happily come to meet us when we are hungry, thirsty, tired and isolated, when we are in our own wilderness, maybe just in front of the television, or computer, or a gossip magazine, or simply gazing out the window. We all have plenty of opportunity to say: 'not God's will, but my will be done.' Slander, anger, resentment, lust, greed, idleness and what you call 'sour grapes' can all be exercised in the confines of your own room and in your own mind with not another person in sight. In truth that is where sin begins, in the loneliness of the human heart. That is straight from the mouth of Jesus in Mark 7:21 *'For*

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from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder...' and so on.

Jesus's 'no' to the devil in the wilderness, and later still when he is in the Garden of Gethsemane, is also private.¹ He is not looking for a grand public gesture. In the book we use for our Confirmation classes, in the chapter on *'Why the world is broken'* it says that our salvation : *'began with Jesus living in such a way that it was as if the brokenness had never existed.'*² I quite like that phrase: *Jesus living in such a way that it was as if the brokenness had never existed.*

You and I cannot live as if our brokenness has never existed. What we can do is allow what is broken in us to start being repaired. We can be repaired by the One who made us, especially by opening up those hardened places within us through fasting, almsgiving, and the great prayer known as the Sacrament of Penance. God knows what we are supposed to look like when we are living un-broken lives because he made us. That is what he came into the world to do: to heal us from the battlefield wounds of Original Sin and give us the courage to say, 'You are my God', rather than 'I am my God'. This is the road to Easter. God is walking with us.

¹ Matthew 16:23, 26:42

² YouCat p29