

CHAPLAIN'S BULLETIN MARCH 6, 2022



Dear Folks,

The journey of Lent has begun. As we look at our Sunday readings (and we shall be using cycle A readings for the 3rd, 4th, and 5th Sundays), I'm suggesting focusing on how they show encounters with Jesus. Everything we do as Church can be summed up into two things: We encounter Jesus and we share Jesus. If we are doing something that does not serve encountering Jesus and sharing Jesus, why should we do them?

This week we see Jesus tempted in the desert. One might first think the encounter was Satan encountering Jesus, but I'm thinking in terms of Jesus encountering Jesus. In His humanity, Jesus faces His strengths and weaknesses, His doubts and fears, His hopes and dreams. He tests Himself. I heard of one Army sergeant who said that they never know how the soldiers will do in battle until they actually get there. Some, including some of the really big, tough guys drop their rifle and run, while sometimes the little mousy guy will step up and do the job. The courage of many Ukrainian people has been amazing and inspiring. Those of us who have never been there cannot say how we would do. When we are tested, we learn that perhaps how we imagined ourselves to be is not quite how we are.

I like to look at how the four Gospels compare, and when they are different, I get curious why. The Gospel of John does not include the temptation in the desert. John emphasizes Jesus' divinity, and generally shows Jesus in control of the situation. John does not include the agony in the garden, and the only suggestion of Jesus' struggle is "I am troubled now. Yet what should I say? 'Father save me from this hour?'" But it was for this purpose that I came to this hour (John 12:27)." Even when He is being arrested, it is clear that Jesus is in charge (see John 18). Mark is the shortest of the Gospels and will often give briefer accounts of events. Matthew has the dialog with Satan as well, but there is a twist.

Matthew and Luke both begin with the temptation to command the stones to become bread (of course, Jesus could have commanded them to become prime rib if He wanted to). When we are really hungry, that is generally first and foremost in our minds. They switch the order of the other two temptations, and that makes me ask why? Matthew has the dialog culminate with the offer to worship Satan, while Luke has the last temptation be to fling Himself from the parapet of the temple. I'm thinking the last temptation would have been seen as the greatest and most important. Matthew, the most Jewish of the Gospels, would see the greatest issue as right worship, beginning with worshipping God, and Him alone. If we don't get our worship in order, the rest of our lives will not be in order. Luke, however, culminates with the temptation to fling Himself from the parapet of the temple and have the angels catch Him. This is a temptation to be protected from the suffering of life, in particular the suffering of the cross. Luke emphasizes that Jesus shares in our condition. He delivers the sermon on the plain at people's level, not from the mountaintop. Might this be why Luke is the one Gospel that doesn't mention Jesus walking on water? I don't know, but I wonder.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke all mention Jesus telling us that we must be willing to pick up our cross and follow Him (Matt 16: 24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23) right after the first prediction of the passion. Only Luke mentions that we must do it "daily."