

Sermon, First Sunday in Lent

6th March, 2022 – St Faith’s Church, Quairading & Holy Trinity Church, York

Readings: Deuteronomy 26:1-11; Psalm 91:1,2,9-16; Romans 10:4-13; Luke 4:1-15

Hymns: Praise to the Almighty the King of Creation, Forty days and forty nights, O love how deep, how broad, Praise and thanksgiving, How sweet the name of Jesus in a believer’s ear, Seek ye first

On Tuesday, 24th February, the Feast of St Matthias, four people were ordained deacon in St George’s Cathedral in Perth. Three of the deacons have appointments to parishes (Midland, Applecross, and Mt Pleasant) while the other will be engaged in Prison Chaplaincy.

For any clergy person attending an ordination, and not least this clergy person whose diaconal anniversary is the 2nd March, Feast of St Chad, the Exhortation to and Examination of the Candidates can be a daunting, but healthy, experience as you are reminded of that which you are called to be and do as a deacon in the Church of God. Likewise, you are reminded of how you have failed to live out this calling fully. The same impact and reflection are true at an ordination for priests. I think this can be true for all members of the Church when a baptism takes place, and we are reminded of our baptismal or confirmation promises.

Being the first Sunday in Lent, we hear once again in the Gospel the story of Jesus being tempted by the Devil in the wilderness. While one is delighted, and impressed, by how cleverly and skillfully Jesus handles, even belittles the Devil’s temptations, I find myself contemplating how well might I have fared if I was the one being tempted! Might I, as we are all capable, taken the easier path or the one of least resistance, and then using one’s guile thought of plausible reasons so to justify my inadequacy.

In their own ways each of the three readings set for today, including that from the Book of Deuteronomy and St Paul’s Letter to the Romans, invite us to reflect upon how well or otherwise we stand up to scrutiny (as with the examination at an ordination) as to being the good disciple of Jesus; or might it be that we stand condemned by our own inadequacies and our capacity to succumb to temptation.

In the Reading from the Book of Deuteronomy we hear how God, having provided for his chosen people, the Jews, land for their inheritance, and how in thanksgiving for that they are called/required to give some of the first fruits of the ground so it can be set before the Altar of the Lord God by the

priest as an offering. The passage reminds the Jews (and indeed us) why they will do this, and more importantly why they would wish to do it for “A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labour on us, we cried to the Lord, the God of our ancestors; the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey.”

As with the Jewish people, in making our offering we are rejoicing in all that is good that has been provided for us and our household by God. When we think of the many blessings we have, how free and creatively and interestingly we can live, how we suffer for no want of food or clean water or healthy sanitation, how we have universal quality health and education systems, the rule of law and equality before it, proper and uncorrupted electoral systems and Government, etc, should we be not prompted to make a suitable thank offering to God for our agreeable, free and relaxed lifestyle!

In the reading from St Paul’s Letter to the Romans, he encourages us to be people “who believe with the heart and are so justified, and who confess with our mouths so are saved”. He continues by reminding us that Holy Scripture says, “No one who believes in Jesus will be put to shame!” The question for us is to decide, are we going to allow ourselves to be tempted to avoid being those who confess with our mouth and believe in our heart of the saving grace and justification through Christ? If we succumb to such temptation how will people ever know if we do not live as those convicted of the worthiness and righteousness and goodness of following Jesus Christ?

May I invite you then this Lenten journey to be people for whom temptation is something which with which we can deal for we know and live out the words; indeed, the instructions of Jesus Christ:

One does not live by bread alone.

Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.

Do not put the Lord your God to the test.

Let us then go out to live a Holy Lent, preparing ourselves as well as we can to be ready for the celebration of great joy, hope and expression of sacrificial love which is our Lord’s Crucifixion and Resurrection.