

Jesus in the Wilderness: the First Temptation

On the first three Fridays in Lent I thought it would be good to look in turn at the three temptations Jesus experienced in the wilderness and to reflect on how they might relate to issues of peace and reconciliation. We have just heard St Matthew's account, which is the Gospel reading for the first Sunday of Lent this year (Matthew 4.1-11).

And so let us consider the first temptation: *Jesus fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished.* ³ *The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread."* ⁴ *But he answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"*

Taken literally this temptation is quite understandable. Jesus has been fasting a long time and is very hungry. For him with his divine power the idea of turning the stones around him into bread would perhaps be an easy and attractive one. And yet behind this image I would suggest that we can see at least two more general truths.

Firstly, the quick and easy solution is not always the best one. This is often the case in the process of reconciliation where the aim is lasting peace and real justice. Simply to give in to the demands of one side is not necessarily the answer. Reconciliation can be a difficult and complex task. It requires proper analysis, perception and wisdom, and it can take time. It requires both sides to work hard at reviewing critically their own preconceptions and prejudices, and really understanding the situation and point of view of the other side.

Secondly, reconciliation requires an acknowledgement and true understanding of the deeper underlying issues involved and of the wider context. For situations of conflict and injustice do not arise in a vacuum. One needs to look below the surface to the moral and ethical principles and requirements.

For Christians this means looking beyond the obvious, the purely material, to see the demands and will of God. Those demands of goodness, justice and love are also required to be taken into account in the process of reconciliation.

The whole purpose of Jesus' ministry, life and death was to reconcile humanity to God. That was his mission, and it is the mission of the Church, of those who seek to follow our Lord to share in that task of reconciliation. And so let us too like Jesus endeavour with God's help to resist in our own lives the temptation to take the easy option and to ignore his will.

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