

## Jesus in the Wilderness: the Second Temptation

On the first three Fridays in Lent we are looking in turn at the three temptations Jesus experienced in the wilderness and reflecting on how they might relate to issues of peace and reconciliation. We have again just heard St Matthew's account (Matthew 4.1-11).

This week we consider the second temptation: *The devil took Jesus to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"*

This temptation is ostensibly a much more specifically religious one. The Temple in Jerusalem was the spiritual heart of the Jewish faith and nation. If you were going to do anything dramatic that was the place to do it. You would certainly get noticed there and make a great impact.

Jesus did go on to perform miracles and they witnessed to his divine power and authority. And yet they were all directed not at himself but at others. They were acts of healing, of compassion, of love. This second temptation, on the other hand, is purely self-centred. The devil is tempting Jesus to say "Look at me; look at what I can do" which is totally contrary to his mission of making known the kingdom of God.

We have to acknowledge that religion is at the heart of many conflicts and yet so often it is used for purposes of self-interest rather than for its own sake. Such conflicts reflect human misuse of religion rather than reflecting in any way the will of God. Quite the contrary in fact. For God's will is peace, justice and love.

In any process of reconciliation all this has to be recognized and taken into account. The opposing parties have to be able to see the true nature of their own motives if any progress is going to be made. There has to be a mutual recognition of wrongs that have been committed on both sides.

This second temptation is based on faith, yes, and yet it is also an invitation to recklessness. The process of reconciliation is not a rash one, relying on dramatic actions. Instead it requires careful thought. It requires a rational and realistic approach. The process requires honesty and indeed humility.

For Christians the basic message of this temptation is that God's ways are not always our ways. Lent is a time particularly geared to self-examination, to growing in faith and love, to conforming our lives more fully to the example of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. With God's help may we use this season profitably in that way.

10 March 2017  
Kingsley Boulton