



# ST. STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

11856 MAYS CHAPEL RD., TIMONIUM, MD 21093

Sunday, March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2017 - Lent I,

*"Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him."*

## ✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son and of The Holy Ghost. Amen. ✠

When you've been teaching or preaching for any length of time, you find that you unmistakably have favorite themes that you find time and again; sometimes sussing them out where more casual readers fail to see them, or where fellow would-be scholars missed them in the pursuit of their own favorite tropes.

Just a few weeks ago, Fr. Kerouac joked in his sermon that I've often teased him that he seems to find the sacrament of the Eucharist in the overwhelming number of Gospel readings or other appointed readings. And he wasn't really joking, I have indeed said on a number of occasions, "Father Mike, you see the Eucharist everywhere." Now, the fact that he sees it where I don't doesn't mean he's wrong; on the contrary, the one time I decided to dig my heels in for a debate, I wound up admitting that he was plainly right; I didn't see it, because I wasn't looking for it at the time.

Now, the fact that he was right doesn't mean I don't still tease him about it when I'm feeling ornery. Sometimes at lunch, I like to engage in a bit of gaslighting, and order nothing but bread and wine the whole time, all the while insisting that it's all in his head.

For me, that theme has for years been the humanity of Jesus. Not just the humanity of Jesus, but the breadth and depth of Jesus's human nature. As a young Christian, the fact that Jesus was both fully human and fully divine at the same time was fascinating to me. As a student of Scripture, the ways in which this was necessary for our salvation became even more fascinating to me.

So I grinned when I cracked open the Book of Common Prayer to see the Gospel appointed for this week, because this is where the human nature of Jesus really comes into play for repairing the fallen nature of man; this is truly where the rubber hits the road. Here in the desert, alone and hungry, Jesus makes good where the first man failed. Jesus here begins to repair the damage done by Adam; as fully God yet fully human, Jesus wins not only the battle, but ultimately the war for humanity - Jesus meets temptation on every level, and although his body and his mind are hungry and fatigued, He resists the temptation to pride and to disobedience.

And the imagery, if you really pause to think about it, is incredibly powerful. Man's initial failure, at the hands of Adam and Eve, takes place in a lush garden, overflowing with fresh food to eat, clear and clean water to drink, and all of man's possible needs able to be met with things that are free and

abundant. Jesus's victory, conversely happens in the desert; a place made barren of comfort and sustenance by man's fall. Yet even here, in a place bereft of water or food or peace or encouragement, Jesus stands in holy defiance of the devil and his temptations. And in doing so, He begins to clear a path for us back to the garden. Not the literal Garden of Eden, mark you, but back to a place where we may indeed be in the presence of God as Adam and Eve were.

God did not join us in the person of Jesus Christ merely to preach to us, though preach He did. And He did not take on our nature just to give us a solid example, although He certainly gave us that as well. He became one of us so that He could redeem us; He became one of us to redeem our human nature by succeeding where Adam failed, and by succeeding where we might otherwise fail.

These temptations are entirely apropos to our human condition, too. We all know that empty, almost nauseated feeling you get when you've been without food for the day, much less for days. And the devil says to Jesus, "come, eat, be comfortable; break your fast a bit early." But Jesus refuses; like the Israelites wandering in the desert, Jesus knows that when the Father wants Him to eat, He'll eat. The parallels aren't lost on Jesus of course, so His reply is especially witty when you remember that it's taken from Deuteronomy: "*And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live.*"

Next, the devil plays to Jesus's vanity. You see, if Jesus were to fling Himself from the pinnacle of the temple, and invisible angels did indeed glide him to a soft and graceful landing, the assembled Hebrews would have no choice but to crown Him as Messiah right then and there; His ego would be fed, and we might skip all this talk of crucifixion. Fortunately, trying to play to the vanity of God who has already humbled Himself to the point of taking on our human nature, is a bit of a fool's errand. Finally, in an all or nothing attempt, the devil offers Jesus all the kingdoms of the world. And while the devil was free to roam the earth and do what he would, and while there can be no argument that he certainly had his hand in the making and

maintenance of powerful kingdoms, this is still folly. Jesus knows that in the end, every knee will bow and every kingdom will be His. He rejects this shortcut to glory, knowing that His true glory will be in the final taking away of the sins of the world, and in His victory over death and the grave. The devil goes away in defeat, and angels minister to Jesus, offering him succour.

The Bible calls Jesus the "last Adam." He is the last Adam in that there is no need for further redemption or resistance to temptation. He is the perfection of humanity, and righting of man's first wrong. Jesus had to meet and conquer these temptations in the strength of his human nature and with his own fortitude of character, yet assisted by the divine grace of God. And this doesn't just redeem our nature, it gives us a model that we can achieve. We, in our human nature, **can** resist sin and temptation, assisted by the divine grace of God.

Surely, we can't do so perfectly; if we could, we would, and Jesus's sacrifice on Calvary wouldn't have been necessary. But we can resist sin and temptation more often than we give ourselves credit for. The devil hasn't given up, and you shouldn't expect him to in your lifetime, especially during Lent. The devil will still show up when you're weak, and whisper in your ear that perhaps it's time to end your fast early. Fasting is good for the spirit and great for spiritual warfare, so don't be surprised when you feel tempted to abandon it.

And when you're not fasting, don't be at all surprised if you're tempted to seek glory for yourself instead of for God. Glory feels wonderful in the moment, but it's fleeting. Be that as it may, it has an addictive nature that the devil loves to share with you. When you're serving your community or blessing the downtrodden with service, don't be surprised when you have the opportunity to make it all about you. On the contrary, be shocked when you're not being distracted with opportunities for personal glory or avarice; it's the devil's in trade.

While we will not be made perfect in this lifetime, we have a new model to follow. We are invited to no longer walk in the footsteps of Adam, but in the footsteps of Jesus. We are able, through divine grace, to say the words of Christ, "*Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.*" **Amen**