Spirituality
Pencil Preaching



by Pat Marrin

View Author Profile
patrickjmarrin@gmail.com.

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

February 25, 2023
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint



“Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil” (Matt 4:1).

First Sunday of Lent

Gn 2:7-9; 3:1-7; Ps 51; Rom 5:12-19; Mt 4:1-11

If original sin turned the garden of paradise into a desert, it was appropriate that Jesus begin his ministry to redeem the world by confronting the devil in the desert. The Adversary who defeated Adam and Eve will be thwarted by the New Adam who reclaims Creation and humanity by overcoming death on the tree of life.

Pairing Genesis 2 with Matthew 4 invites us to see other images of the drama that recapitulates so many biblical themes in salvation history. Jesus is led by the Spirit into the desert for 40 days, replaying Israel's long sojourn under Moses, when temptations over bread, miracles and idolatry will seduce them into sin again.

Someone, representing all of us, had to get it right. Jesus, revealed as God's true Servant, is obedient where Adam and Eve and their descendants were disobedient. The Serpent, cunning to the core, approaches Jesus not with raw enticement but with the Scriptures: "If you are the Son of God," make manna in the desert, let his angels protect you from harm, and, by the way, if you really plan to save the world, let me give it to you in all its splendor.

Jesus responds three times by also quoting Scripture, denying Satan even the smallest acknowledgment. There is no real power except God. Everything else is illusion and blasphemy.

The primitive church preserved this story of how Jesus laid the foundations of the Kingdom of God by turning back the most basic denials of divine sovereignty. We human beings cannot usurp the absolute role of the Creator. If we carry in our essential identities the image and likeness of God, it is because God intended to adopt us in Christ, not goad us to claim that we can be rival gods, little sovereigns free to create our own reality.

Lent is the time when we learn again to submit. The basic truth held by all the Peoples of the Book -- the First Commandment of the Jews, the Submission of Islam and the Obedience of the Christ -- is the same. The path to God is by the power of God, through God to God, all things in God. The lie of human pride and the folly of self-worship must end in surrender and service before we can begin our journey home to paradise.

We fast and pray and give ourselves away to recover our sight and sense of direction in the trackless waste sin has made of our world. Jesus, our brother, has gone before us and stirs our hearts to remember the garden we have been

promised. Behold the tree of life ahead. It is the ladder to heaven, the burning bush, the pole in the desert displaying the saraphs, the staff of Moses, the sign of the Cross. See it, believe in it, embrace it, and it will guide you through death to eternal life.