

## REMEMBRANCE AND TEMPTATION

### *Sermon for Lent 1A-Mt. 4:1-11*

LPC, 3/5/17

In my Ash Wednesday sermon I talked about the significance of the ashes, which represent the reality of death in our lives. Our culture goes to tremendous lengths to deny the reality of death, but without death there can be no life.

It is not just the inevitability of our own physical death we must come to grips with, it is the reality that through our lives we are going to face the daily little deaths that remind us that we are not the center of the universe. Eventually we will have to give up the things we treasure most— our youth, our health, our independence.

In the meantime when things are not the way we think they should be, we experience little deaths. Unless we can learn somehow to accept these little deaths and in the process acknowledge that we are not the center of the universe, we will fritter the great gift of our lives away in anger and frustration.

I suggested on Ash Wednesday that we really learn how to live when we learn how to die. By this I mean that we learn that we are not the center of the universe. And I further suggested that a really appropriate Lenten discipline would be to face into our fear of death, and all the other fears that disguise our fear of death. That kind of self-examination, in its depth and honesty, is the kind of self-examination that Lent is about. Having named our fears, we can submit them to the Lord of love who wipes them out.

I also referred to the words in the Ash Wednesday liturgy that accompany the imposition of ashes: “Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return.” I suggested that the most important word in this phrase is the word “remember.” This Lent, remember who you are, whose you are, and where your treasure is.

In today’s Gospel lesson we have an example of someone who always remembers who he is, whose he is, and where his treasure is. Jesus is being tempted by the devil. Jesus has fasted for forty days and is probably physically weak and morally vulnerable. Temptation comes to Jesus in an incredibly subtle way. The devil starts out his temptation by saying, “If you are the Son of God...” The devil is appealing to what is best in Jesus in an attempt to bring out his worst.

Wow. Let this be a lesson to us. When someone flatters us by appealing to what we most value in ourselves, beware of what comes next. Always remember who you are, whose you are, and where your treasure is, and take strength from that.

This is in fact is what Jesus does. He doesn’t need to be told by the devil that he is God’s Son. He is not taken in by the doubt of that fact that the devil insinuates by introducing the conditional word, “if:” “If you are God’s Son.” There is no “if”! Jesus is God’s Son. Fortunately Jesus never allows himself to forget this.

A lot of temptations enter our lives through doubt that we are indeed the children of God. For many of us it is literally too good to be true that we have been adopted by God. We know deep down that we are not worthy of this. But when we allow ourselves to doubt it we are vulnerable to thinking and acting in ways that are inconsistent with who we really are, whose we really are and where our real treasure really is.

All the time our doubt is based on a fallacy invented by the devil: that our adoption by God is something we did and conditional on what we are able to do. It is not. Our adoption as God's children is something that God does and only God.

If God does not want to let us go, there is no way that we cease to be God's adopted children. And God does not want to let us go.

If we conduct our Lenten self-examination by examining our fears (as I recommend) we may do so without fear. If we remember who we are, whose we are, and where our treasure is, we need fear nothing.