

The life of God

CRACKED WIDE OPEN

Diocesan Lent Course 2021

in the paschal mystery

The suffering, death, resurrection
and glorification of Jesus

Diocese of Chichester Lent Course 2021

Week One
Bible Notes

The Gospel for the 1st Sunday of Lent:

St Mark's Account of the Temptation of Jesus (Mark 1.9-15)



The baptism of Jesus

9 At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. 11 And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." 12 And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. 13 He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

The Beginning of the Galilean Ministry

14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

Notes for Bible Study

Lent (from an old-English word meaning 'springtime') is a season of repentance and conversion, beginning on Ash Wednesday and lasting for 40 days. It is focused on the coming festival of Easter, the greatest in the Christian year, when we celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus.

In the Western Church it is traditional to begin Lent by reading one of the accounts of the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness, this year that of St Mark. (The others are Matthew 4.1-11 and Luke 4.1-13 though it is also mentioned in Hebrews 4.15). Mark's version is sparse and direct.

For more details of the temptation we should also read the other accounts.

The painting to the left shows Jesus vanquishing the shadowy figure of Satan.

It is a golden rule in reading a segment of Scripture chosen for worship that we should pay attention to what comes directly before and immediately after the passage.

In this case we have Jesus right after his baptism in the Jordan by John the Baptist being driven by the Spirit (a powerful image!) into the Judean desert. Though Jesus' baptism was his call to mission before he could answer it fully he needed a time of retreat.



Retreat for Jesus however was not some period of rest - it was rather a struggle with evil and the allurements of power. By saying no to Satan, Jesus began his coming victory at Easter. That is why we begin Lent with this story of his first triumph. God has given his Son the victory right from the beginning and always will! But what comes after this passage is equally important.

Having been plunged into the fire of God's will and received the empowering Spirit (in baptism); having faced and defeated evil (in temptation); having been purified by focusing on God (by fasting), Jesus begins his public ministry: "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is come near, repent and believe in the good news."

He then calls the apostles, beginning with Simon and Andrew, James and John.

This year as we begin Lent, Bishop Martin invites us to reflect on the first mark of the Church, as set out in the Creed and highlighted in our diocesan vision: unity. Two vitally important matters emerge as we ponder this Gospel passage:

- How can we today respond to Jesus' call and really surrender to him so as to live in union with God?
- How does the proclamation of the Kingdom of God and the calling of the apostles bring us unity today as Christ's Church?

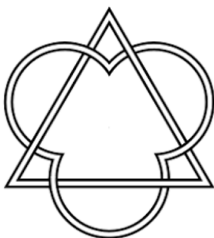
Union with God in Christ – a mystery of surrender

The keyword is – surrender! Christian faith is pure gift. Remembering his promise of mercy, God has come to visit us from on high (Luke 1.68-79).

He has pitched his tent amongst us (1 John 14.). As Paul teaches, we don't have to do anything at all (Ephesian 2.8-10) except give way to God and believe in the one whom he has sent (c.f. John 6.29). A good discipline for Lent is therefore simply to let go, drop the heavy 'baggage' we all carry (especially self-justification!), and surrender ourselves into God's hands. We have to reduce the compulsions of our egos and clear a space inside us, where the voice of Jesus can resound as once it did in Galilee.

But the Holy Spirit plays a vital role. We received the Spirit in baptism. Yet the Holy Spirit is not a thing but a person...the third divine person, God the Holy Spirit. We have to let the Spirit drive us as he drove Jesus. Where does the Spirit drive us? It is into union with God our Father and union with one another. That is the deepest meaning of being the Church: union with God and human community in Christ (Romans 12.5).

An early Christian martyr, Cyprian, put it wonderfully: "The Church is a people called into unity - from the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."



Our unity as Christians in the Church

Anglicans know that bishops play a vital role in maintaining the unity of the Christian community, the church. The bishop does that in three ways:

- As a living successor to the Apostles Jesus first called in Galilee, Peter, James, John, (and of course Mary Magdalene, called by tradition 'The Apostle to the Apostles' as she was the first to meet the risen Lord). The Church is not an abstract idea but a community of living persons deriving from that first community Jesus founded – the bishop keeps us in historical unity with the origins of the Church.
- As a link person between local churches. The Church of England retains the wise ancient tradition that no bishop is ever ordained by a single bishop alone – rather neighbouring bishops participate (with a minimum of three). Thus the 'horizontal' unity of local churches is maintained – e.g. the Christian community of Chichester is held in union with St Albans, with Durham, with Liverpool, etc. through the Bishop who represents – embodies! - those communities.

- The Archbishop of Canterbury as 'first among equals' keeps us in unity with the bishops and churches of the worldwide Anglican Communion in the unity of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, purchased by the blood of Jesus and born at Pentecost.
- As the image of Christ, the one true prophet, priest and shepherd. In the bishop's celebration of the Eucharist, the unity of the whole diocese is represented; in the bishop's ministry of Confirmation the Spirit of unity is given; and by ordaining ministers the bishop ensures that the local Christian community (the diocese) is united to the whole Church.



Prayer. It appears among us when we are faithful to Jesus and his teaching, and when we celebrate together the Eucharist, the sacrament of his Kingdom.

**“The Kingdom of God is
come near!”**

This unity is given us by the risen Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit joins us to Jesus through faith and joins us also to the first Christian community, right back through time, even as he impels us forward into the future to meet the Lord when he returns.

But this unity is a fragile gift and we often damage it. The Christian community is not yet the Kingdom of God! We are a sign of that coming Kingdom, for the arrival of which we pray daily in the Lord's

- What does that Kingdom look like? The Church's services (Common Worship, Feast of Christ the King) describe it beautifully, calling it,

*...a kingdom of truth and life,
a kingdom of holiness and grace,
a kingdom of justice, love and
peace...*

- Whenever the Church is tempted to mistake itself for the Kingdom it is on a pathway to disaster. But God raises up prophets from among his people to remind us that we are only signs and instruments of a Kingdom yet to come in all its fullness. Such were Francis of Assisi and Catherine of Siena in their day, such also Martin Luther and John Wesley in their's.

- This Lent as we reflect on our unity with God in Christ, let us pray for +Martin our Bishop and his suffragans +Ruth and +Will, the successors of the Apostles in this place; let us surrender to God asking him to free us for service to one another; and let us look forward to the resurrection of Christ at Easter with the joy of holy longing!

Study Questions

- What negative things in myself prevent me from fully surrendering to God in Jesus and living in deeper unity with him?
- What negative things prevent the Christian community from realising its deepest unity in Christ?
- How do we live our unity with our bishops in such a way as to make the Christian community grow and thrive?
- Paul says that we become members of one another by sharing the Lord's bread and cup. How can the sacrament of Holy Communion build us up into being Christ's body?



Prayers

Collects for the 1st Sunday in Lent
Almighty God, Whose Son Jesus
Christ fasted forty days in the
wilderness, and was tempted as we
are, yet without sin: give us grace
to discipline ourselves in obedience
to your Spirit; and, as you know our
weakness, so may we know your
power to save; through Jesus Christ
your Son our Lord, who is alive and
reigns with you, in the unity of the
Holy Spirit, one God, now and for
ever. Amen.

Heavenly Father, your Son battled
with the powers of darkness,
and grew closer to you in the desert:
help us to use these days to grow
in wisdom and prayer that we may
witness to your saving love in Jesus
Christ our Lord. Amen.

Lord God, you have renewed us with
the living bread from heaven;
by it you nourish our faith,
increase our hope, and strengthen
our love: teach us always to hunger
for him who is the true and living
bread, and enable us to live by every
word that proceeds from out of your
mouth; through Jesus Christ our
Lord. Amen.

Prayer for Unity

Gracious God, lover of all,
in this sacrament we are one family
in Christ your Son, one in the
sharing of his body and blood and
one in the communion of his Spirit:
help us to grow in love for one
another and come to the full maturity
of the Body of Christ. We make our
prayer through your Son our Saviour,
Jesus Christ. Amen.

