

1 Lent

21 February 2010

Deut. 26:1-11 * Ps 91:1-2,9-16 *

Romans 10:8-13 * LUKE 4:1-13

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May the words of my mouth
and the meditation of my heart
be pleasing in your sight, O Lord,
my Rock and my Redeemer. AMEN

Here we are, just days after Ash Wednesday. We have washed the ashes off our foreheads, but the words still linger: *“Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return”*.

We have only to look back in the Book of Genesis to find the story of our beginning.*the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the man became a living being.* (Gen. 2:7) So we are more than our bodies. We have within us that which is not of us: God’s gift of breath. Breath comes from the Latin word ‘spiritus’. Inspiration is the process of inhalation, inspire, or to be inspirational. Expire means to exhale air from the lungs or to die; the breath / life, the spirit leaves the body. God’s breath, God’s spirit, enlivens our physical selves, creating us as whole human beings. I guess we could think about ourselves as dust being held together by God. God is the glue so to speak that keeps us from falling apart.

This reminds me of my friend Jack, who continues to wait for his liver transplant. His daughter will be the donor and the surgery is planned for April. As you might expect, this is certainly a wilderness journey for Jack. He had this to say after receiving ashes on Wednesday nite. “The ashes are a comfort to me. From the humus and soil, the Creator shaped us and breathed life into us. God is closer to us than our very next breath, and will follow and catch us when the final exhalation leaves our lips.”

We are “God-filled dust”.

I need to be reminded of this, so I have a poster on my mirror that reads: *We are not human beings experiencing a spiritual life, but rather spiritual beings experiencing a human life.* (Teilhard deChardin)

Jesus is still wet from his Baptism when *‘full of the Holy Spirit he was led by*

the Spirit in the wilderness'. This is not a spirit that is off in the distance calling to Jesus. This is a Spirit that fills the whole being of Him. His encounter with the devil proves who he is. The Son of God will not practice magic, ask for special protection or seek political power. He enters the wilderness as a Spiritual being claiming His humanity.

We don't hear much about the devil as we gather on Sunday mornings for worship. We tend to focus on 'our sin' and repentance, especially during Lent. Our BCP (p848) tells us that Sin is the seeking of our own will instead of the will of God, thus distorting our relationship with God, with other people and with all creation.

What do we know about the devil? One thing we know for sure, Satan does not show up with a pitch fork, horns, red long johns and a pointy tail. It just so happens that today is Orthodoxy Sunday. The Orthodox Church talks about the devil as an evil spirit. An Anglican, who became an Orthodox Bishop, Kallistos Ware, has written a book entitled: *The Orthodox Way*.

Bishop Kallistos writes: *"For Orthodoxy the fall of the angels is not a picturesque fairy-tale but spiritual truth. Prior to man's creation, there had already occurred a parting of the ways within the noetic realm: some of the angels remained steadfast in obedience to God, others rejected him. Concerning this 'war in heaven' (Rev. 12:7) we have only cryptic references in Scripture.; we are not told in detail what happened. For us, at this present stage in our earthly existence, Satan is the enemy.The rebellion of the angels makes it abundantly clear that evil originates not from matter but from spirit. Evil is a wrong attitude towards what in itself is good. The source of evil lies thus in the free will of spiritual beings endowed with moral choice, who use that power of choice incorrectly." (pp 57,8) Not even the demons are evil by nature, but they become such through the misuse of their natural powers. Evil is always parasitic. It is the twisting and misappropriation of what is in itself good. Evil resides not in the thing itself but in our attitude towards the thing - that is to say, in our will" (p47)*

A London newspaper sought the help of its subscribers in addressing the problem of evil. Readers were invited to send in their responses to the question: What is wrong with the world today? The best response of all was also the briefest. It read: **Dear Sir, I am.**

During the service on Ash Wednesday, we were called into *the observance of a holy Lent, by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God's holy Word.* (BCP p265).

The word Lent comes from an Old English word meaning "spring", the time of lengthening days. Early Christians observed a season of penitence and

fasting in preparation for the Paschal feast. It began as a fast that lasted two days, but over time became a fast for forty days, in imitation of Christ's fast in the wilderness. This time was important for those preparing for baptism and for those guilty of notorious sins who were being restored to the Christian assembly.

And so today, the first Sunday in Lent, we are called to move from our own Baptism into the wilderness. Remember when Jesus called the disciples? They 'dropped everything' to follow him. We are called to do just that - drop everything and follow Jesus. Actually, going into the wilderness will take us away from many of our temptations. Leaving behind our cell phones, our computers, our high-definition televisions, our over consumption of food, and any other addition or distraction that we may have. We are called to imitate Christ and hand ourselves over to the Holy Spirit. We are called to listen, to pray and to meditate on God's holy Word. What we are called to give up in Lent is control of self and our task is to become what we already are - *holy dust.

Our journey in the wilderness during this Lenten season is not about "I am" but about "we are". We are in relationship with God, with one another and with creation. We cannot separate our dust from the earth, nor our spirit from God. We are called to return again to our Baptismal promises: to renounce Satan, all evil powers, and our own sinful desires. This is not something we are capable of doing on our own, only with God's help can we begin a holy Lent.

Our food for the journey will be our Bible study where we meditate on God's word, prayer offered by and for one another and a healing service offered in March. I suggest that you read the Sacrament of Reconciliation in the BCP beginning on page 447. If this speaks to you, I encourage you to speak with either John+ or Susan+ and receive this Sacrament during the season of Lent. As we empty ourselves and seek God, He will fill us.

[Let us pray:](#)

Almighty God, your Son Jesus Christ fasted forty days in the wilderness; give us grace to direct our lives in obedience to your Spirit; and as you know our weakness so may we know your power to save; through Jesus Christ our Redeemer. AMEN