

During the first four weeks of Lent, the Eucharistic Prayer reminds us of what Lent is all about.

The prayer has at its core the sentence, “Through fasting, prayer and acts of service you bring us back to your generous heart.”

I have been wondering if it is possible to relate those three disciplines, fasting, prayer and service to the temptations of Jesus presented in the Gospel.

☒ The practice of fasting is not necessarily about giving up food. It can be that; but this year Facebook posts encourage us to give up plastic; it may be reducing our carbon footprint; or even giving up the use of social media.

Fasting is about recognising some of our basic appetites and hungers and “discovering the hunger beneath the hunger” (Debie Thomas).

As Jesus was hungry for bread, if **we** can use the fast days (either partially or fully) of Lent we might ask ourselves, ‘What are we hungry for ... and what can feed us so that we can nourish others?’

In all honesty can we say with the psalmist: As the deer pants for the water, so my soul longs after you? Or, in different language, how hungry are we for the Kingdom of God?

☒ The second temptation which Jesus faces is around worship and what we hold most dear. In the story, Jesus is being encouraged to worship the ways of the world: success, power, riches. And it can be tempting to try and measure God’s love and favour toward us by the success criteria of the world. But Lent provides an opportunity to journey toward the Cross and to highlight the ways of the Kingdom. Indeed our Eucharist this morning starting with the Beatitudes and the upside-down values of the

Kingdom, gives a chance to check out what it is that we are bowing down to in homage and adoration, what it is we value most.

So in all honesty can we say that our prayer is 'THY kingdom come ... and 'Let it begin with me'? Remembering that prayer is less to do with changing God's mind and the way things are and more to do with changing us and the way we respond to the world.

☒As the Gospel story unfolds, Jesus is taken to a High Place and encouraged to throw himself down. It is a temptation, I think, to NOT trust God and to remain invincible; the so called angels will save him from any harm or hurt. But Jesus recognises that His vocation and journey, His service for the whole world, on the cross and beyond inevitably involved pain and suffering, he will dash his foot against the stones, he will fall to the dust of the earth.

So, as Lent provides us with an opportunity to serve, either directly or indirectly through alms giving, we might ask ourselves: how can we move from lip service to costly service.

Giving tins of beans to the Foodbank and buying the Big Issue are important, vitally important, but they won't change us or the situation because they do not make us vulnerable or cost us anything. Although Ignatius of Loyola taught us not to count the cost, he didn't say there wouldn't be a cost.

Or as Margaret Thatcher famously said, no one would remember the Good Samaritan if he only had good intentions. The cost of service is not always financial, it might be in terms of time, or energy or reputation but there is a cost to discipleship.

// The truth is, most of us here take to heart the message of a Holy Lent – we try our best with fasting, prayer and service (sometimes with an emphasis more on one than another) – and we hope that our Lenten discipline will become a part of our whole life and everyday life style.

But we also hear the ominous note that Luke introduces into the story: “and the devil departed from him until an opportune time.”

Despite our best intentions, when we are under pressure, stressed out, sick or tired temptations take these opportune times. Then our Lenten disciplines can flip into greediness, wrong-headed worship and self-serving.

Aware of this Luke, who among the Evangelists has a great devotion to the Holy Spirit, would urge us to listen to his story:

Just as it was the Holy Spirit who led Jesus into the wilderness in the first place, so it is the Holy Spirit who in our fasting, prayer and service will strengthen, lead and encourage us on our way and bring us back to God's generous heart.