

The Deacon's Bench



The First Sunday of Lent

By Deacon
Brian Conroy

Reflections
on Sacred
Scripture

When my four children were young, one of our regular activities was a weekly trip to the library – exchanging one pile of picture books or easy-readers for another each week. They were always so excited. I loved my time with them, and I loved the library myself. Books are still one of my passions.

While the kids were rummaging in the stacks and choosing, I did a little idle searching too and one day I randomly ran into a little book by Johannes Baptiste Metz titled *Poverty of Spirit*. It's not much more than an extended essay really. The book addresses the heart-of-the-heart of today's Gospel, the Temptation in the Wilderness. Lent has begun with this story recalling Jesus' forty days of fasting in the desert. His time of trial mirrors the forty years the people of Israel wandered in the desert -and likewise, our Lent mirrors the forty days we will spend together as a community journeying through a time of preparation for the Triduum.

Metz underscores the point that while Jesus was tempted by 'the devil' in the wilderness, the temptations themselves were not to be God-like as Adam and Eve were tempted to do, but to betray his mission given to him by the Father: to become fully human, to humble himself to accept our human condition with all its limitations. Note that the Gospel says the *Spirit* drove him into the desert. There he's hungry and is tempted to turn stones into bread – in his divinity he could do it, but a human being cannot – so he did not. Likewise with the devil's offers of power, fame and recognition that followed. No human being could accomplish these things without divine power, so Jesus did not. "Rather he emptied himself and took the form of a slave..." He was faithful to his mission to our humanity.

We, too are tempted to be more than human, tempted to fight against our own limitations, our own tendency toward sin and death. But today we are encouraged to fully embrace our human condition with all its struggles just as Jesus did. Not only our own humanity, but also the human condition of those around us. Jesus provides the example that our humanity is a gift – a treasure. Through his passion, death and resurrection, he will provide the divinity, the power and the glory.

As we began Lent with the *memento mori* on Ash Wednesday we may have been exhorted to 'repent and believe in the Gospel' or perhaps to 'Remember that you are dust and unto dust you will return.' A serious reminder of our own humanity, our own mortality. As Psalm 90 says, "Our days are seventy or eighty for those who are strong." Well, I am getting close! It's my own humanity closing in on me! Closing in on all of us. Mortality is something we all have in common, as well as our weakness, failures, and sin. Jesus came to address, indeed, to remedy those issues. We trust him to make the bread of life out of the stones of our own humanity, to embrace us today in the Eucharist where we pray, "By the mystery of this water in wine, may we come to share in the divinity of Christ, who humbled himself to share in our humanity."