

HOMILY – FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT – YEAR A

Based on St Matthew 4: 1-11 | By Rt Rev'd Dr Geoffrey S Robinson CJ

May I speak in the Name of God, who is +Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.



Today, at the beginning of the Church's forty days of Lenten observance; all eyes should be truly fixed on Jesus; who, as we have heard in scripture was tempted by the devil in the wilderness.

Jesus was preparing himself for his active ministry, and ultimately for his sacrificial death on the Cross. So His Church should prepare herself once again, to celebrate the saving mystery of redemption at Easter. For forty-days then, the whole Church should give herself to fasting, to self-discipline, to spiritual exercises, and to active works of charity.

Thinking about these Lenten tasks though, my mind was turned to a story I heard a few years ago. It was about a priest who was approached one night by Satan himself.

On appearing to the priest, Satan said: “Do not be frightened, I only want to make you tremendously powerful, famous and rich in return for just one small favour – I want half of your ability to hear.”

The priest was stunned and said: “Let me think about that for a while.” The next morning, the priest requested a meeting with his bishop. “Your Grace”, he said, “I need your advice about a temptation I have been offered!” He then related his strange encounter. The bishop was shocked. “A deal with Satan!” He spluttered, “Do not do it, it will destroy your soul!”

But the bishop could see the priest was not convinced, and so he arranged a meeting with the archbishop. “Your Excellency, this priest has an urgent matter he needs advice about!” He re-told the story.

The archbishop bowed his head in silent prayer, and after a few moments responded. “Firstly, your hearing is a gift from God. It would be forbidden to sacrifice even a small part of it. Secondly, a deal with Satan!? You must never do it!”

But, as you can imagine, the priest wasn't convinced, as he was imagining all the wealth, fame and power

he'd been promised. So, reluctantly, the archbishop requested an audience with the Pope.

The three of them went into the Papal Palace at the Vatican in great awe. Eventually, the archbishop spoke. “Your Holiness, this priest has been offered a terrible temptation by the devil and needs your advice!” –

“Sorry, asked the Pope, how did you say that the devil tempted your priest?” I have had many meetings with the devil; so could you speak a little louder please, as I only have half my hearing!”

Well, I wonder how often we are tempted to do something which we know to be wrong. Perhaps even worse, we may even give way and then fall into serious wrongdoing and spiritual sin. For when we neglect church teaching and turn a blind eye to sin, we negotiate with the enemy, and we make deals with the devil.

Recently, the Archbishop of Canterbury has come under attack from traditionalist of the worldwide Anglican Communion, and has finally, because of his serious administrative failures resigned his office. You may say that there is nothing new in senior clergy

failing in their responsibilities ... and you would be right. But many now believe that move within the Established Church is the “final straw”– and a move, so to speak, that has “broken the camel’s back”.

I say that because, a group of Anglican church leaders from around the world have finally severed any connection with the Archbishop of Canterbury as their head. The reason follows decisions to allow the blessing of same-sex couples in all Anglican Parishes of this land and following the damning report about the church's handling of John Smyth, who is believed to be the most prolific serial abuser associated with the church.

Over the past thirty years or so the Established Church has adopted an ultra-liberal approach by ordaining female ministers; allowing ministers to occupy parsonage houses along with their same-sex partners; and, if that is not enough; the majority of the House of Bishops have continually supported liberal Christian teaching by their clergy.

This latest move however has raised widespread concern, because the Church of England has passed a vote to BLESS what God says is a SIN.

What seems to be often overlooked is that such ways are not Christian at all. When human reason is stressed and is treated as the final authority, bishops, priests and deacons, together with everyone in communion with them; move into a heretical state of being.

Let us all be well assured that liberal theologians who seek to reconcile Christianity with secular science and modern thinking, often treat science as all-knowing and the Bible as fable-laden and false. This is only one small example of how Satan can and does work his evil ways!

Today's Sacred Scripture and Catholic Tradition gravely warns and reminds us, that the devil does exist, and that he is our enemy, and that he never sleeps.

Sometimes he leaves us more or less alone; sometimes he ferociously assaults us. Sometimes with great subtlety he invites us to commit minor infidelities. Sometimes more openly he urges us to complete betrayal. But we should never consent.

On our own we are weak and liable to fall. But we should not forget that we are never alone. We stand in

the power of the Holy Spirit, and of Jesus, who never ceases to feed us with his Word, and Sacraments.

So when we call upon Him in any case of necessity, he will send his holy Angels to defend us, to care for all our needs, and to lead us, unfailingly, to our heavenly homeland.

AMEN.