

## SERMON KRIJTBERG SATURDAY MARCH 5TH 2022

Gregory Brenninkmeijer SJ

We know the story, my dear friends, don't we? We hear it every year at the beginning of Lent. Jesus remains forty days in the desert being tempted by the devil. And we again admire Jesus for not giving in to those temptations. And we are once more invited to ask ourselves: What are the temptations occurring in my own life and how am I bearing up to them?

The forty days in the desert must obviously remind us of the forty years the people of God were struggling through the desert. It was a time of trials and testing. There always was the choice either to return to the fleshpots of Egypt and slavery, or to trust and follow God's guidance towards the promised land.

Just like his people Jesus was brought by God's Spirit into the desert to be tempted by Satan. For him the temptations were aimed at his mission: To be God's promised Messiah. The people were expecting the Messiah. They had been waiting for that Messenger of God. But what they expected and hoped for was not what God had in store for them. Yet the devil tempts Jesus to go for the expectations of the people, instead of living up to God's plan. Become a charismatic miracle-worker. Or become a mighty king who lords over all Israel's enemies. Or finally take possession of God's temple as the real highpriest, who reigns over the hearts of the people. But Jesus refuses to be a Messiah of power, honor or success. He will always be guided by God's will and by God's word.

These three temptations are somehow always the devil's arsenal. Success, Honor and Power; or if you prefer: Popularity, Prestige and might. Three temptations aiming all three at self-exaltation of ME. Every temptation suggests that giving in will be to my profit. What it always boils down to is egoism. I, my profit, my fun, my happiness. It is quite sad that we do not seem to be able to learn from our experience but again and again fall into the devil's trap and do what seems so attractive to me but more often than not harms our neighbor, our loved ones, our climate, our world. Jesus did not give in to the lure of evil. He unflinchingly held on to his heavenly Father and to God's will for the wellbeing of his people. Jesus' union with God kept him from seeking his own grandeur.

Lent is the time of the year that we are invited to renew and strengthen our relationship with God. If we reduce during these weeks our consumption, it is to remind us that we do not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from God. We are invited to pray more attentively and to celebrate the sacraments with more fervor. We are challenged to open our hearts and hands to the needs of our fellow men, turning our attention away from our own wellbeing and towards others, who are waiting to be noticed, seen, helped, loved.

One way of concentrating on our relationship with God is of course: counting our blessings. That is what Moses taught the Israelites to do once they were settled in the promised land. We heard it in today's first reading. In harvest-time you must bring a sample of the fruit of your land to the temple, place it on the altar of the Lord, your God, and make this pronouncement: "My father was a wandering Aramean". But during the course of history the Lord, our God, always stayed at our side. He led us out of slavery, heard our voice and saw our misery. He brought us to this land, where milk and honey flow. Here then I bring the first fruits that You, Lord, have given me.

Remembering what God did for us, for me, is one of the strongest ties that bind us with God together. Lent is a privileged time to remember and to thank God for all the good things that happened to you privately, or to those around you. Thank God even for the good that resulted from difficult or painful experiences. Remembering what God did for you through the kindness of others and what He did for others through you.

The beginning of Lent this year is of course heavily stamped by the war that erupted around Oekraïne. It touches everyone and asks for a reaction. Our first reaction may be anger or unbelief. We might be looking for the culprits to punish them, or try to find ways to minimise the effects this war is having on us, on me. But nobody can turn his or her back on the plight of the victims, the fugitives. On those who already have lost loved ones or find their home, their business in ruin. What can we do to help, to commiserate with all those, who innocently and against their wish are caught up in this conflict? There is so little we can do to help.

We can pray! Ask God to strengthen everyone's yearning for peace and bless every effort to stop the fighting. Yes, let us pray, although it feels like asking the Lord to come and clear up our mess. There are about ten Jesuits at work in Ukraïne. Together with their fellow-Jesuits in Poland they do what they can to help the fugitives. We have decided to donate this Sunday's collection to their project. That is what we will do and I can only recommend this collection to your benevolence. And our heavenly Father, who sees all that is done in secret, will reward you,  
Amen.