1 Lent C 2025

 Together, this Lent, we gather with our belief and our hearts, and come before the altar of the Lord, giving over to God the only gift of our worship that God demands—us, our lives and relationships, our bodies and souls, our remaking of the world and all that has been made. What binds us as one is the Word of God that is in our minds, on our lips, and in our hearts. We are saved, and now it is up to us to live in gratitude and in imitation of our Crucified and Risen Lord.

 *“Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days He was tempted by the devil.”* There are two traditions about the devil. One portrays him in the Book of Job as a divinely assigned tester. He works with God to uncover what is in people’s heart. A second portrayal of the devil is in the First Letter of Peter as the enemy of God’s purposes. In the Gospel of John, the devil who enters into Judas, is the evil one bent on undercutting God’s salvific activity. These portrayals come together in today’s Gospel, revealing the steadfast heart of Jesus as He rejects Satan’s strategies.

 When we understand today’s Gospel correctly, we understand what is at the heart of Jesus’ mission. We might imagine this scene of Jesus and the devil as just an obstacle that Jesus needs to jump over before He can begin His life’s work. But this scene *is* His life’s work, what the purpose of Jesus’ ministry is.

 Jesus came into this world to defeat evil, to oppose all that is against God’s will. The devil represents the evil of the world, which Jesus intends to destroy. The Greek word “temptation” correctly translated means “test or contest.” The devil comes not to tempt Jesus as to fight with Him. Today’s scene is a struggle, a battle, against evil. every subsequent scene in Jesus’ ministry is a continuation of it.

 When Jesus heals a man who is crippled, Jesus is not doing an act of kindness for an unfortunate individual. Jesus is declaring that it is God’s will to destroy every sickness, to eliminate whatever cripples human life.

 When Jesus heals a blind man, Jesus is not simply reaching out to an individual in the darkness. Jesus is declaring that it is God’s will to eradicate every kind of blindness—the blindness that puts greed above service, that puts violence above love, the blindness that would put coercion over human respect.

 When Jesus teaches the crowds on the hillside, He’s not simply giving advice. Jesus is revealing a truth that can be used to confront evil and destroy it, a truth that opposes prejudice, manipulation, and hate.

 Everywhere in Jesus’ ministry, the battle continues. Every action of Jesus is a contest with the evil of the world that is first presented in today’s Gospel.

 St Luke knows the power and influence of evil, and says *“When the devil had finished, he left Jesus, to await another opportunity.”* The opportunity presents itself in the events in Jerusalem. Those events are the Paschal Mystery which make us Christians. Our faith stands on the conviction that the cross and resurrection of Jesus has defeated the devil, and has inaugurated the ultimate defeat of evil. Even though it’s incomplete now, the devil’s final defeat will not occur until Jesus returns and destroys every evil forever.

Until that day we take up Jesus’ mission of healing, relieving human suffering perpetrated by structures of racial, sexual, social and economic prejudice and exploitation. Evil is not a problem that can be solved by theories or Christian beliefs. To see evil as part of the divine mystery requires a perspective that imitates Christ in overcoming sin and suffering by incarnating the patient power of love that reconciles.

*“We are spouses, when by the Holy Spirit the faithful soul is united with our Lord Jesus Christ, we are brothers to Him when we fulfill ‘the will of the Father who is in heaven.’ We are mothers, when we carry Him in our heart and body through divine love and a pure and sincere conscience; we give birth to Him through a holy life which must give light to others by example.*

*“Oh, how glorious it is to have a great and holy Father in heaven! Oh, how glorious it is to have such a beautiful and admirable Spouse, the Holy Paraclete! Oh, how glorious it is to have such a Brother and such a Son, loved, beloved, humble, peaceful, sweet, lovable, and desirable above all: our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave up His life for His sheep.”*