

1st Sunday in Lent February 10, 2008 – Matthew 4: 1-11

Do you think that God tests us? Have you ever wondered if God was testing you in some way, maybe through a difficult situation? Sometimes, I wonder if God put us in situations in which he is attempting to test our faithfulness, to see how we will respond.

This certainly raises a number of theological questions, questions that many of us have probably asked at some point in our lives. Let's begin by looking at what Holy Scripture has to say about this beginning with today's Gospel.

Listen to the opening verses of today's Gospel, "After he was baptized by John, Jesus was LED by the Spirit (the same Spirit which had descended upon Jesus during his baptism in the river Jordan- Remember that story the sky is torn and the Spirit descends like a dove as a voice bellows this is my beloved Son.)

Immediately after his baptism ---Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil."

"Led- by the Spirit into the wilderness? To be tempted?" Was it God's intention that Jesus confronts Satan in the wilderness? Was God testing his own son?

Certainly, Scripture is filled with numerous stories in which God appears to be testing His people. Remember the story of Abraham and Sarah. Abraham and Sarah had waited for years to have a child, and then Isaac is born, a long awaited promise from God. But then God tests Abraham by asking him to sacrifice Isaac, as a burnt offering.

Or what about the Israelites wandering in the desert after Moses had led their escape from Egypt? For forty years, God would test the Israelites and their faithfulness before God would allow them to enter the Promise Land.

Moses even refers to Israel's time in the desert as a test from God. He says in Deuteronomy 8:2 " And you shall remember all the ways in which the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not."

What about Adam and Eve? God places them in the beautiful and lush Garden of Eden, a place filled with everything they could ever need or want. He allows them free reign to eat from any tree, except one, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Was this a test? Was God seeing if they would be faithful to his command?

Well, we all know how that turns out. // Like young children, Adam and Eve do exactly what they are told not to do!

The biblical witness certainly seems to point to a God who at times tests his people. But does God directly put us in situations that test our fidelity and faithfulness towards him or is not quite that simple?

Does the testing that comes come as our ways and the ways of the world clash with the ways of God? Remember Isaiah 55: 8 and 9 "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

[SLOW]

Is Jesus' testing, is the Israelites testing, is Abraham's and Adam's and Eve's testing a result of a confrontation of allegiances, a battle between an allegiance to self and an allegiance to God?

Think about Jesus first temptation for a moment. For forty day he has gone without food, he is famished. Think about what that must have been like--- think about how hungry you feel. when you skip just one meal.

How tempted would you have been to turn stones into bread?

And now Satan presents Jesus with an opportunity after forty days to fulfill his physical need to eat. However, Jesus refuses. He has the power and ability to feed himself, to fulfill his own needs and yet he is able to see that that would be a selfish- exploitation- of- his- power.

Rather Jesus is faithful in his belief that God will provide for him.

Adam and Eve don't fare as well when their allegiances are tested. They have a wonderful opportunity to live in peace and harmony, to have all of their needs provide for in the Garden by God. However, when the opportunity arises to eat from the one tree they have been forbidden to eat from.

Curiosity and selfishness prevail and we find that their allegiance to self wins out. They put their ways and their perceived needs before the ways of God. And as a result, **they are cast of out paradise.**

Is the testing we experience perhaps more about a confrontation of the allegiances in our lives?

Is our testing merely an experience of trying to live a faithful life, one that asks us to love our neighbors as much as we love ourselves?

Is our testing an experience of the clash of trying to go it alone, trying to provide for ourselves rather than placing ourselves and our needs in the loving and compassionate embrace of God?

Is our testing merely our experience of believing that **our ways** are better than God ways and **our thoughts** greater than God's thoughts?

So does God directly put us in situations that test us? I don't think we can answer that on this side of eternity. For God's ways are his ways and sometime we are not privy to those kind of answers.

However, I am certain that when we attempt to lead faithful lives we will be tested-- as our allegiances are confronted as we attempt to choose the way of God over the way of self and the way of the world.

May we find comfort in the fact that when the tests do come, like Jesus in the wilderness, God will send angels to wait upon us, who will remind that God's grace is sufficient for us in anything and everything we will encounter on this side of eternity.

AMEN