

There is a wise old saying, “If at first you don’t succeed, skydiving is probably not for you..” But, apart from parachuting, it is almost always easier to successfully achieve something the second time round. For example, how many of us, I wonder, passed our driving test on the first occasion? Having been through the experience once, it is easier the second time because we have a better idea of what is going to happen. We are better prepared for the unexpected - primarily because we are now expecting it.

Unfortunately, we don’t always get a second try. Some events take place in our lives which are one-offs, there is no second chance. Indeed, our lives themselves are a one-off event. When we die and are finally called to task before our Lord, we won’t get the opportunity of a second try. Faced with that prospect, it’s surprising how often we relegate our spiritual life in favour of the more mundane things in life. When we finally die, there’ll be no opportunity to put right the things that we did wrongly, neither will there be any opportunity to do the things we never got round to doing. We should always be mindful of the fact that we will not know when we will be called and should always be in a state of readiness to meet God and to account for ourselves.

However, the very reason that we have any opportunity at all to find righteousness with God, is because God loves mankind so much that he gave us collectively a second try. Nothing that you or I could ever do will make us worthy of redemption. We only have this opportunity because of the love of God. This lies at the heart of St. Paul’s writings. He knew that nothing we could ever do; no physical acts could ever make us worthy of redemption, but that through faith in Christ Jesus we would be saved.

Now it wasn’t always like that. The events regarding the Garden of Eden explain how mankind had been created without sin but that we had given into temptation. The devil had tempted and we had succumbed. But God didn’t leave it like that. Although there are no reasons why God should do so, other than the fact that he loves us so much, God sent his own Son - a second Adam - to save us. Let’s pause for a moment and compare these two men.

Jesus, like Adam before, was born without sin.

Jesus, like Adam before, was tempted by the devil.

Jesus *unlike* Adam before, did not give in to temptation but resisted.

The gospel narrative we have just listened to records the first time in history that a son of Adam has raised an effective defence against the devil. It is worthwhile to remember that this series of temptations took place at the start of Jesus’ ministry, just after he had been Baptised in the Jordan. If you remember, after his Baptism, the Spirit descended on him in the form of a dove and the Father’s voice from heaven declared him to be the Son of God. So the devil made this fact the point of his challenge, more or less a case of “If you are the Son of God, prove it!”

Jesus, however, didn’t fall into the trap of arguing with the devil. We should always remember that temptation is always cleverly constructed with sufficient logic embedded so that it appears plausible. This is why we are so bad at resisting it. Instead Jesus recognises the motive behind the temptation and addresses this instead.

In his response, Jesus doesn’t rely on clever dialogue or reasoned argument but instead, for each conjecture, returns to Scripture and it is worthwhile to look at which portions of

Scripture Jesus quoted and why he quoted those particular ones. In so doing, we find that the answer sheds a great deal of light on the whole meaning of the episode.

For starters, each of Jesus' responses come from the same book, the book Deuteronomy; a name which means "second law" since the book is a restatement of the divine law which God gave to Moses; a law for man to live by. Jesus' responses are in effect as follows:

"You say that feeding my body may take precedence over obeying God, but God has told *men* that they are not to depend on bread alone, therefore *I* will not do so.  
You offer me universal power at the price of worshipping you, but God has told *men* that they are not to worship any but him therefore *I* will not worship you.  
You suggest that I should test these promises to suit my own convenience, but God has told *men* that they are not to test him in this way therefore *I* will not do so."

In so doing, Jesus is deliberately emptying himself of power and glory and putting himself in the position of a man, under the authority and law of God. Remember that Jesus is both perfect God and perfect man. His humanity, his identity with those he came to save, is declared in this passage. Jesus is, in fact, going back to the beginning; he is the new Adam. The first Adam listened to temptation and set the whole human race off on the wrong track. Jesus is the second Adam and he confronts the tempter alone in the wilderness.

The difference is that Jesus will win, because he is the totally obedient man. He is man as man was meant to be; man who is totally righteous, man who never loses his relationship with God. This is not the crucial conflict, but is the first recorded between these two parties. The second conflict will come later, as today's reading has it at "an opportune time". That time is the time of the cross – which is what the word crucial actually means.

We are now in the season of Lent, a time of preparation as we await the triumph of the cross and the glory of the resurrection. The forty days of Lent, reflect the forty days of Jesus' preparation in the wilderness. I exhort you to make sure that we use this time wisely, studying scripture, deepening your faith through prayer and meditation. Like Jesus, we will all be tempted throughout this period to deviate from our preparations. We will face distractions, conflicts, each one plausibly presented to try to turn us away from our Lenten observances. Let us pray that we will have the strength and grace which the Spirit gives to allow us to overcome, so that when our time comes, we will be able to face him without regretting those missed opportunities.