

Wednesday March 17 St. Patrick's Day

Luke 4:1-13 – starting as He means to go on

- 1 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert,
- 2 where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.
- 3 The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread."
- 4 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone.'"
- 5 The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world.
- 6 And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to.
- 7 So if you worship me, it will all be yours."
- 8 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"
- 9 The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here.
- 10 For it is written: " 'He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully;
- 11 they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'"
- 12 Jesus answered, "It says: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"
- 13 When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

Today I invite you to continue journeying with me through Lent 2021. We've stopped on the way to look at a number of landmarks; LAMENT, FEAR, REPENTANCE and THANKSGIVING. Now another one; PERSEVERANCE. When I was preparing to write these reflections, I had forgotten that PERSEVERANCE is also the name of the rover which is now on the surface of Mars, beginning its exploration of the enormous crater where it touched down on February 18. I love the names of some of the other probes that are on the Red Planet. One of them is *Curiosity*; launched in November 2011, it landed the following August and is still at work, thanks to its solar powered batteries, nine years later. No wonder the latest arrival is called *Perseverance*!

So why choose this theme for the next few days? Well, we've had to persevere for a whole year now. Day after day, week after week, we've been keeping our distance, washing our hands, wearing our masks, and so forth. We may have to keep doing these things for more months to come, vaccines notwithstanding. Remember, it's not just about protecting ourselves; if we keep doing these things, we keep protecting other people as well. So, says Paul in his letter to the Galatians, "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up." In other words, PERSEVERANCE.

On this Saint Patrick's Day I find the same staying power in the ministry of Patrick. In his *Confessio* he looks back over his long ministry on this island, and he writes:

"I didn't deserve at all that the Lord would grant such great grace, after hardships and troubles, after captivity, and after so many years among that people. It was something which, when I was young, I never hoped for or even thought of. "

One final point. Back on the first Sunday of Lent, the gospel reading included Mark's brief mention of the temptations of Jesus in the wilderness. Matthew and Luke in their gospels tell us in detail what those temptations were. But today, let's remember also how Luke's version ends: "When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time." (4:13). Ah, "... until an opportune time". In other words, to quote Arnold Schwarzenegger, "I'll be back!" Read the gospels again, and see all the obstacles, trials and temptations thrown in Jesus' path. But he persevered to the end. And then, on the

cross, he broke down the barrier that separates sinful human beings from a holy Creator. When he cried out “It is finished!” it was not a cry of despair: it was a cry of “Mission accomplished”.