

PRECIS OF A SERMON ON LENT 1 AT OLD ST MARTIN'S CHURCH, WORCESTER

By Canon Paul Tongue

Text: The tempter came and said to Jesus, "if you are the Son of God....." Matthew 4: 3

If you are the Son of God. We truly believe he was – he is the Son of God. And because he was Son of God the temptations he received were real temptations for him. God made man. They are so far removed from temptations that afflict us mere mortals – either in the 1st or 21st century.

because you are not me, and I am not you. And each and every one of us is totally unique, and different in so many ways. The things that tempt me are probably no temptation to many or most of you. The Devil knows this – he is truly 'crafty' (Genesis 3: 1) – he knows our weak spots and exploits them in every way he possibly can.

Let me dive in with both feet, and pray it will be a useful exercise for you and me.

Stones becoming bread. Not willing to accept that they are stones. Not satisfied with the status quo. Getting itchy feet. Not accepting our life as it has been given to us. [i am not criticising legitimate ambition, aims and goals in life] Think of health, and the limitations that illness can bring. We may pray, and seek all kinds of medical help, but at the end of the day we may have to accept it and live with it. I think of St Paul, praying that his problem (whatever it was) would go away, but in the end accepting that his problem was part of God's will, and recognising that God was actually using his problem in proclaiming the Gospel. (Read it for yourself in 2 Corinthians 12: 8ff)

The same kind of consideration can apply when illness comes to a member of the family. Do not resent it, but ask God's strength to live with the situation and make you a good and godly carer.

Throwing yourself off the pinnacle. Getting to the end of your tether. Finding life almost impossible. Being driven to distraction by something or someone. Single mothers coping with children. Pray for the gift to persevere, whatever the impossible mountain that seems to face you – and know that you are not alone, that many people face similar situations, and that the Lord is with you and them, and will never forsake you or leave you alone. Just think of Pilgrim's Progress and the trials and tribulations of Pilgrim. Or the story of the footprints in the sand. Two people walking through life together, you and the Lord hand in hand. Suddenly two sets of footprints become one. Has the Lord deserted me? No, he has gathered me up in his arms and carried me through a crisis. Suddenly two sets of prints resume, and we are both walking through life hand in hand again.

I will give you the world and its splendour. The sin of covetousness. Keeping up with the Joneses. Wanting to win the Lottery. Wanting bigger and bigger houses, even when you cannot afford them. And even if you can, is there something else that God would want you to do with your wealth and possessions. **"Worship the Lord your God, and serve only Him"**. (Matthew 4:10) Loving service of God and neighbour is the measure by which we must live. Anything less than total living by this measure is sin – and we are all there. But we have a Saviour who has been tempted himself, and this helps him to have mercy, and even forgive our sins, whatever they are. In the face of such love and mercy for us sinners we must be totally honest with God (to coin a phrase from the '60's !)