

Sermon

St Peter's Brighton Beach

Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> March 2022

The First Sunday in Lent

Luke 4:1-15

'I turn to Christ'

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*The temptation of Christ, 1854,*  
by Ary Scheffer,  
National Gallery of Victoria.

We who live in modern western society are no longer accustomed to speaking about death. Death is taboo. And so Lent today is something like a healthy, reality check. Here to help us to come to terms with reality, not as we may like it to be, but as it truly is. On Ash Wednesday, our acceptance of ashes upon our foreheads, is a symbol of our mortality. Today, on the first Sunday of Lent, our

Gospel reading calls us into an acceptance of our place in this world, not as we may like it to be, but as it truly is. We are not God. We are human creatures, in a world of a Creator God. Today, we turn to face the evil one. Today, we reaffirm our solemn vow, made at our baptism, that we reject Satan and all that is evil. Today, we turn to Christ.

As Christians we are those who refuse temptation, original, universal, to want to be God. To want for ourselves the glory that belongs to God alone. By our radical refusal of worldly temptation, not only today, but all the days of our lives – we too, like Jesus before us, have the victory over evil. By this victory, we one day will win our victory over death, too. We too will share in that victory that our dearly beloved brother Bill Kleeman, has won. We too will enter into the fulness of the kingdom of God. Where there is no more dying, or suffering, or handicap, or pain. Where there is a final compensation, for the deficiencies, and handicaps, of this present world. For the meaning of suffering, here, in this present world, is the salvation that God will bring about, in the next. This world is not the kingdom of God.

From the very beginning of the Christian church, the antichristian spirit was understood, not as a single figure, but as a number of such figures. False teachers, their false, seductive teachings, wooed people away from Christ. Within modern society, they appear in the form of the many alternative, and especially this-worldly, doctrines of salvation, to which we who live our lives within modern western secularised societies, are now exposed. Jesus is the Son of Man. The Son of God, he is the representative of us all. His temptation is our temptation:

‘Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, ‘To you I will their glory and all this

authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.’

How can we have the victory over evil? By our exclusive worship of God alone, can we be led not into temptation. As we read in our Gospel today, ‘Jesus answered him, ‘It is written. ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’’

In a Wednesday editorial this week, ‘Putin gives a wake-up call from folly of indulgence’, according to one newspaper ‘it is amazing how quickly the threat of war can bring clarity and urgency to cut through the contemporary fog of muddled Western thinking. As Russian troops have [entered] Ukraine, there has been a seismic shift in consideration of topics that for too long have been bogged down in the indulgences of the culture wars. Like the pandemic, the invasion of Ukraine and the threat of a wider war in Europe have galvanised leaders and ordinary people to focus on what is most important. This includes unity among people of like mind in the defence of freedom. On the streets of Kyiv, citizens from all walks of life have put aside any petty preoccupations of identity politics to take up arms to defend a greater purpose: their national identity.’

‘Mr Putin’s bloody actions,’ the editorial concludes, ‘have given the world an opportunity to reflect on its history and the supremacy of freedom and the rules-based order. The worst contemporary folly has been the constant undermining of Western civilisation, history and national virtues. Partly it is deliberate subversion by cultural Marxists, but mostly it’s the polite acquiescence of diffident and historically ignorant people conditioned not to give offence. Mr Putin, by his actions, has snapped Europe out of its lethargy and woken the world to its folly. Not before time.’

Speaking to the Australian yesterday, the Prime Minister Scott Morrison declared the Ukraine invasion ‘a very big wake up call’ to the world, and one that he hopes will ‘rip away the veil’ that conceals the true nature of Russian and Chinese authoritarianism: ‘the arc of autocracy’, that is opposed to the modern democratic spirit. The modern democratic spirit, that is borne of the Christian spirit. The Christian spirit that affirms the eternal value of the individual. The Christian spirit that affirms the dignity of every human being. The Christian spirit that is opposed to the spirit of socialism. The spirit of socialism that would see the subordination of the individual to some acceptable image of society. Against this, Christianity is the root, and the power of modern democratic society. As it is the future of modern democratic society. If modern democratic society is to have any future at all.

Not in the many alternative, and especially this worldly doctrines of salvation, but in the salvation that God will bring about, in the future of the kingdom of God. As this has already now dawned in this world, in Jesus Christ, the crucified and resurrected Son of God.

In the words of Tish Harrison Warren, in the New York Times, on Monday:

‘Ash Wednesday doesn’t end with the imposition of ashes. After the ashes, in the Anglican Book of Common Prayer, the priest asks that “at the last we may come” to God’s eternal joy. Then we take Communion together, a tangible decree that ashes give way to beauty, that death gives way to resurrected life. The Catholic priest and writer Henri Nouwen called the hope of Christianity — the hope of Ash Wednesday — a “transcendent realism.” Transcendent realism confronts the truth of the grave. And it is in this truth that the most important questions of our lives get a hearing. We need more than diversion, work and pleasure. We need deep, resonant, defiant hope.’

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