

**Reflection on the Gospel-1st Sunday of Lent Year C
(Luke 4:1-11)**

-Veronica Lawson RSM

Lent is a time for personal as well as group reflection, a time for entering into the “wilderness” or “desert place” and grappling with the mysteries of life. While deserts are often depicted as uninhabited or desolate regions, anyone who has spent time in such places knows that the desert supports a rich diversity of other-than-human life. Human retreat to the wilderness can be an opportunity to encounter God in the unfamiliar and self in relation to the other-than human. It can reveal to us our capacities for right relationship with God, with each other, and with the Earth. Right relationship resides in “power-with” rather than “power-over”.

In Israel’s story, the wilderness is the place of testing for God’s people: “Remember the long way that your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness... testing you to know what was in your heart” (Deut 8:2). Jesus is “filled with the Holy Spirit” and, like so many human beings before and since, is “led by the Spirit” into the wilderness to be “tested” there. [“Tested” is a more accurate translation of the Greek *peirazein* than the usual “tempted”].

The three-fold testing of Jesus in the wilderness is about the proper exercise of power and about trust in a loving God. In refusing to turn the stones of the wilderness into bread in order to satisfy his own hunger, Jesus demonstrates that he is not prepared to exercise power over the other-than-human Earth, even if he had the capacity to work such magic. By refusing to accept the “glory of all the kingdoms of the world”, he shows that power over the human communities of the Earth is not “of God” and that worship belongs to God alone. Finally, in refusing to cast himself from the parapet of Israel’s holiest shrine, the Jerusalem Temple, he makes it clear that he is not prepared to test the power of God to rescue him from a self-inflicted death or to use God’s holy place to such ends. The Lukan Jesus passes the tests that the people Israel failed in the wilderness of Sinai.

Adelaide priest, Michael Trainor, in a wonderfully sensitive reading of Luke’s gospel, detects three ecological ethical principles in today’s gospel reading: 1) Earth is to be cared for and treated respectfully, not ravaged through greed; 2) All ecological and environmental engagement is grounded in and enhanced by one’s communion with God; and 3) Earth’s resources are to be respected by all and not usurped as a means of power and control by one over another (*About Earth’s Child* 2012, pp.107-109). These principles derive from the story as a whole with its three-fold testing and from Jesus’ three-fold response to these tests.