

Anglican Church of Freiburg  
Ash Wednesday Service  
March 2, 2022  
Homily

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'"

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 give 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." Jesus answered him, "It is written, Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him."

Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written,

'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"

Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Even as the church bells rang for the Ash Wednesday service the celebrant in our fellow parish in Kiev said- For the rest of the world today is Ash Wednesday but for us it looks like Good Friday. It is dark. It is bleak. It is raining death. But our hope is that Easter is not too far behind. Friends, we celebrate Ash Wednesday this time in the shadow of an unjustifiable war and great pain and loss. We celebrate the Eucharist today in the context where human beings and God's precious creation is being turned into ashes by cruel artillery use.

The prognosis of the impact of the war would be far more costlier than humanity could ever imagine. Generations to come will look back at each

one of us and ask- what were you doing when so much of suffering was unleashed. We will surely be held responsible for our silence, our inaction and our inability to do anything. Our attempts to find excuse saying I prayed or I gave would not be adequate enough answers.

When there is tears flowing like a river all over the world- what does repentance mean.

When human beings are being charred to death by the heavy weapons of fellow human beings what does Ashes mean to each one of us today.

We can talk of the politics of war, the economic interests behind wars and the motives of the weapon industry and energy industry in perpetrating violence. But it does not make an adequate response to our numbness.

It was a meaningful gradual that we sang in this context

When peace like a river attendeth my way

When sorrows like sea billows roll

Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say

It is well, it is well with my soul

It is well (it is well)

With my soul (with my soul)

It is well, it is well with my soul

At Ash Wednesday today we meditate on the temptations of Christ. It talks about resistance to avarice, resistance to greed and resistance to megalomania.

I have always been encouraged by the way the ashes are made for this day. The burning of the Palm Sunday cross was a very symbolic event. I know of a young friend who was given to lose his temper quite often and the Palm Sunday morning the fight was a tough one. By the time he regreted it was too late. Much damage was caused. After the service was over he went to the pastor and said- I must win over my anger. The pastor took a look at the palm in his hand and asked. What are you going to do with this. He said, like every year I would have it in my room. The pastor said- Well, I will tell you a secret to get rid of your anger. Each time you become angry and you know it- take a pin and prick a hole in the palm cross. He agreed and soon realised too many pin pricks were happening. The next time he saw the pastor he said- now prayerfully make an attempt for Zero prick days in your life. He tried. He controlled and it worked. Ash

Wednesday came. The pastor said- We are going to burn this cross today and I will make a mark of cross with that ash. It would testify that the past is blotted away and behold everything is new. You will now be able to live overcoming the temptation of anger.

### **First question of Lent is this- What do we live for?**

According to Luke the forty days of fasting is over and the evil one is still lingering on. Fasting it is said, is feasting with the angels. Jesus having finished fasting was hungry and in that moment of seeming vulnerability the evil one comes in lingering by.

Turn these stones into bread- get your bread through magic. That was the call. Not that Jesus was not able to do it. But instead he says- Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

Being able to live by the word of God- requires faith.

Kasand Zakis in his Last Temptation of Christ writes-

“A prophet is the one who, when everyone else despairs, hopes. And when everyone else hopes, he despairs. You’ll ask me why. It’s because he has mastered the Great Secret: that the Wheel turns.”

It requires mastering the secret- The Wheel turns. You are not gonna be here for long and all that you gain through unfair and undue means will only remain a baggage for you.

Live by the word of God- On Ash Wednesday we look back and ask- Were our lives directed by the Word of God. Did we drift away. Do we require a course correction. A coming back?

Lent as a Time where we ask “What do we Live for?”

**Secondly, Lent as a Time to ask. “What are the Idols in our Lives?-** Anything that you love more than God, Anything that you have a worshipful attitude to- they could be our idols. Anything we would rather do at the cost of Godliness and God.

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 give 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.” Jesus answered him, “It is written, Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.”

There is always a very important question- What is it that human beings are satisfied with- and a famous answer is- Just a Little More. The devil understands this. So Jesus is being led up and all the kingdoms are shown to him. And the offer is- Worship me and all these shall be yours.

Crossing the boundary, acquiring a little more, then a little more is basic human nature. At some point they stop being satisfied with anything and goes out on a rampage of expansionism and violence. They do not count the cost and the means. They are not bothered about the misery unleashed. They just need to expand and expand and expand. They want the others' also to be theirs.

The answer of Jesus is simple- Worship God only. Serve God Only. If God is the epitome of Love. Justice. Equality and Peace I will serve that God and not Mammon who offers profits and power.

Temptation is the devil looking through the keyhole. Yielding is opening the door and inviting him in.

Friends, all boundaries are arbitrary. Mostly drawn by people with utmost cultural and ethnic insensitivity. Issues around those should be handled in love not by perpetrating hatred.

And therefore the second question is- What do we love more than we love God

Deliver us from everything that may entangle our affections and harden our hearts. From the global scenario this is true in our own homes and our own lives. What are our idols today? Those that we treasure more than God.

### **The Third Question of Lent is “What does it mean to trust in God?”**

Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written,

‘He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’”

Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

The Devil Takes You to Pinnacles Only to Tempt You to Jump. The angels will take care of you.

The response of Jesus is clear- Do not play with God. Do not put God to test.

When we cross over into another person's territory are we not putting God to test

When we steal the life and possessions of another are we not putting God to test

When we force people to flee and seek asylum in unknown territories are we not putting God to test

When we just depend on rhetoric and talk of sanctions but do little to mitigate the pain of the suffering masses- are we not putting God to test.

When we kill when the commandment says Do Not- are we not putting God to test

When we steal when the commandment says Do Not- are we not putting God to test

When we covet when the commandment says Do Not are we not putting God to test

When we live a life of ungratefulness despite all the blessings received from God are we not putting God to test

Richard Sibbes once said- Satan gives Adam an apple, and takes away Paradise. Therefore in all temptations let us consider not what he offers, but what we shall lose.

Today as we prepare for the Lenten prayers of repentance and the imposition of ashes we will be singing

Turn our hearts (x 2)

Turn our hearts from pride and anger

To your ways of peace

For you died and shed your blood

That enmity may cease

What does it mean to trust in God.

Teresa of Avila summed it beautifully “. . . it is presumptuous in me to wish to choose my path, because I cannot tell which path is best for me. I must leave it to the Lord, Who knows me, to lead me by the path which is best for me, so that in all things His will may be done.”

In a context wherein fleeing communities are looking back and seeing all their dreams and all they had burn down into ashes- our hope will still be  
On a Hill far away stood an old rugged cross.

Three questions for us to carry home  
What do we live for  
What are the idols we cherish  
What does it mean to trust in God

Amen

Vinod Victor  
March 2, 2022