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The First Sunday in Lent

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THE LOGIC OF LENT

The Church's preparation for Easter falls into three phases, each of them three Sundays. In the first phase, in the three Sundays before Lent, we began our pilgrimage to Easter ("Behold, we go up to Jerusalem"), portrayed in the gospel lessons as a time of disciplined effort and cultivation of God's word, a journey from blindness to vision, a journey to knowledge of the true and eternal good, willed steadfastly with the obedience of charity.

In the second phase of our pilgrimage to Easter, on the first three Sundays in Lent, we learn that this pilgrimage up to Jerusalem involves conflict with diabolical illusions and lies, from whose perverting power we can be set free only by the truth of the Word of God. By an ancient tradition, the Old Testament lessons for this time of year continue the reading of Genesis that began in Septuagesima, and provide a foundation for the equally ancient sequence of epistle and gospel lessons which is printed in the Prayer Book. Thus today's gospel lesson, the story of Christ's temptation in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11) is foreshadowed by the temptation (testing) of Abraham's obedience (Genesis 22:1-18). The theme of temptation (testing or proving) appears also in the urgent appeal of today's epistle lesson (2 Cor. 6:1-10) to "receive not the grace of God in vain; ...behold, now is the day of salvation...; in all things approving ourselves as the servants of God...in fastings...by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth." The practical application of these lessons is found in the collect's prayer for us "to use such abstinence, that, our flesh being subdued to the Spirit, we may ever obey [God's] motions in righteousness, and true holiness".

The Rev'd Gavin G. Dunbar

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