

9th March 2025 – First Sunday of Lent (Year C)

I remember as a young boy being encouraged by my Sunday School teachers to memorise various verses from the bible. There was even a small prize each week for those of us who were successful. Over 50 years on, I can still recall some (but not all those verses).

The setting for our Old Testament reading from Deuteronomy is a harvest festival type celebration known as the Festival of Weeks, which was held to celebrate the harvest of grains and cereals. It may at first seem a strange passage to be reading on the first Sunday of lent, but hopefully its significance will become a bit clearer as we progress. It is one of three credal statements found in Deuteronomy that would have been used in public worship. It enabled the Israelites to recall God's presence with them and helped reinforce their sense of individual and corporate identity. It was in effect an act of remembrance as in good times the people were prompted to recall their painful past, the times of test trial and testing. The passage would have reminded them of their wanderings in the wilderness, how they had lived as aliens in Egypt; the harsh treatment and slavery that they endured. But more importantly, it reminded them of God's deliverance.

It is easy in the good times to become complacent and forget all that God has done. It was vitally important that the people never forgot what God had done for them. The memory of these events was therefore passed on from generation to generation both orally and in writing.

We begin our Lenten journey with that familiar passage from Luke's Gospel that recounts the 40 days that Jesus spent in the wilderness during where he endured temptation. Jesus drew spiritual strength from passages from Hebrew scripture that he would have memorised and meditated on; so much so that they would have been an integral part of his thinking. This is evident in his response to each of the temptations, when he responded: "It is written".

Likewise, our in our New Testament lesson from Romans, Paul reinforces the centrality of the word of God to believers both Jew and Gentile: "The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart".

As we journey through Lent may we use this time to read, meditate on and maybe even memorise verses of scripture. Resources that we can draw on when we face testing times.

Fr Andy Jacobson