The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and
keep it. 16 And the Lord God commanded the man, 'You may freely eat of every
tree of the garden; 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall
not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.'
Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God
had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God say, "You shall not eat from any
tree in the garden"?' 2 The woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit
of the trees in the garden; 3 but God said, "You shall not eat of the fruit of the
tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die."'
4 But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not die; 5 for God knows that
when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God,[a]
knowing good and evil.' 6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for
food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to
make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her
husband, who was with her, and he ate. 7 Then the eyes of both were opened,
and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and
made loincloths for themselves.

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came
through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned— 13 sin was
indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no
law. 14 Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those
whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one
who was to come.

15 But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one
man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the
grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. 16 And the free gift
is not like the effect of the one man's sin. For the judgement following one
trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses
brings justification. 17 If, because of the one man's trespass, death exercised
dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the
abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life
through the one man, Jesus Christ.

18 Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one
man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. 19 For just as by
the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's
obedience the many will be made righteous.

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the
devil. 2 He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was
famished. 3 The tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God,
command these stones to become loaves of bread.' 4 But he answered, 'It is
written,

"One does not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."'

5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the
temple, 6 saying to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it
is written,

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

7 Jesus said to him, 'Again it is written, "Do not put the Lord your God to the
test."'

8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the
kingdoms of the world and their splendour; 9 and he said to him, 'All these I
will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.' 10 Jesus said to him,
'Away with you, Satan! for it is written,

"Worship the Lord your God,
and serve only him."'

11 Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts give glory to you, O Lord. Amen.

Today's readings are all about temptation. We have entered the season of Lent, that time when, more than any other time of the year, we examine ourselves, our hearts and our minds, to see if we are living in accordance with God's will for us. We look at our own lives to see if the things we do bring us closer to God, or if through our actions we are pushing God away. I believe that sin separates us from God, and righteousness brings us closer. We are free to choose what we do. God wants us to choose life, life with Jesus, so that we may in time have life everlasting. If we serve Christ, we will draw closer to him, and in time will come into everlasting communion with him. That is our goal.

What stops us, then? Surely God has given us a clear-enough assignment, one that is easy to accomplish. Follow Christ. Live according to God's laws. Love God and love your neighbour. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Yet the world is full of temptations: some physical, some emotional, som aspirational. We are always tempted to gratify our immediate desires. We need inspiration to conquer those things which tempt us. We need a model of how to live, an example of one who has lived with and overcome temptation.

That model, of course, is Jesus Christ. In the Gospel today, Christ is tempted three times: tempted by glory, tempted by conceit, tempted by wealth. In each case, the devil challenges Jesus to do something completely for himself. Selfishness is perhaps another definition for sin, for if we act only for ourselves, then right away we're breaking those first two commandments.

But Jesus refuses to act only for himself, even though he is the Son of God. As always, he point away from himself, towards God. Look at the three answers he gives to Satan in this passage:

> One does not live by bread alone,
> but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.
>
> Do not put the Lord your God to the test.
>
> Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.

There is always the focus on God. That is the lesson for us. If we are tempted to give in to our temptations, to gratify our own desires, to profit ourselves rather than thinking of others, what should stop us is realising that we are turning away from God.

God is our focus, for God gives us life. He gave us life when we were born, and continues to renew our lives every day. We could not live only on the food we eat, if we did not have the power of God to sustain us from moment to moment. Jesus expresses that power as "every word that comes from the mouth of God," for of course all things were created by God's word: he spoke, and they came to be. For God, speech is action; God's word goes out and does not come back empty. Remember the passage from Isaiah chapter 55:

> For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
> and do not return there until they have watered the earth,
> making it bring forth and sprout,
> giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
> so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
> it shall not return to me empty,

but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it. (Is 55:10-11)

In just such a way does God sustain us: his word goes out and does not come back empty, for it brings life to his children. Every word counts: God does not send out an empty word, and none of his actions is in vain.

This leads into Jesus' second answer: "Do not put the Lord your God to the test." What does it mean to test God? In this case, Satan tells Jesus to jump off the top of the temple, and assures him that God will save him and keep him from hurting himself. But God does not want us to play such games! Testing God shows a lack of faith, not in God's abilities, but in God's willingness to help and care for us.

In our world today there are many who do not trust God, or do not believe in God at all. And this is in spite of all the witnesses we have at our fingertips, not only those we know from the Bible, but also people we can talk to today. We have ample testimony to the existence and love of God. If after reading the Bible and hearing contemporary testimony we still don't believe, that is our problem, and we have chosen not to believe — for faith is a choice. God is not going to stand by and perform tricks for us, like catching us if we deliberately walk off the top of a building. So Jesus quite rightly refuses this temptation. That was a fairly easy one, I think.

But the third temptation probably hits us closest to home, and is one we can all relate to. Satan shows Jesus "all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour" and offers them all to him. This one to me represents the temptation to gain power, to take what is not yours, to accumulate wealth for its own sake. Many in this world have their heads turned, turned away from God that is, by power and money. Those things can have a powerful hold on us, and even become things of worship. But Jesus tells Satan that he will worship only God, and serve only him.

Jesus is God, and there is no doubt about that. But Jesus is also human, and we humans tend to relate to other humans who have shared similar life experience to our own. Since we know that we often feel temptation to go wrong, the fact that Jesus has also experienced temptation *and has overcome it* is comforting. As this episode happens just as Jesus is starting his earthly ministry, it is tempting to think that this is some sort of entrance exam for Jesus, and if it is, he certainly passes. But I feel it is more of a building of experience for Jesus in being human. In any case, we can see that Jesus is one of us: born as we are born, raised as we are raised, and tempted as we are tempted.

And this sets us up for Jesus' greatest lesson to us, for he also dies as we die. But then he lives again — and so can we. Thanks be to God. Amen.