

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent (C)

9<sup>th</sup> March 2025

'Nicene Creed VIII: Life in the Church' (CCC 871–945; 976–87)

Dt 26: *the Lord brought us out of Egypt ...* Ps 90: *upon you no evil shall fall ...*

Rom 10: *if your lips confess that Jesus is Lord*

Lk 4: 1–13: the Temptations in the wilderness

What is Jesus doing in the desert in the Gospel today?

Well, He is doing in the desert what we are trying to do in this 'desert' season of Lent: *overcoming the Devil*. The difference is that Jesus, in the desert and definitively on the Cross, has already overcome the Devil. So as we enter this desert of Lent we are not looking to achieve this victory all by ourselves, but with Jesus's help: we are conscious that He has already gone there, already won the victory, already fended off the Devil's temptations; and so we have great hope that we can do the same. When we begin Lent we do so with Jesus right by our side, and we know that this is true because we belong to the *Church*, the people grafted on to the side of Jesus, the holy Son of God.

We began last Sunday to unpack the final section of the Nicene Creed which treats 'the Church.' Last week we thought about what it means that we profess faith in the "One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church." We have

just two more articles of the Creed to look at in this series for the start of the Jubilee Year, which is also the 17<sup>th</sup> centenary of that 1<sup>st</sup> great creed-defining Council at Nicaea. Today we consider, "*I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins*" and all that flows from that, our rich and fruitful life in the Church.

The *Catechism* states that the basis of belonging to the Church is *Baptism*: through Baptism we become members of that Body of Christ, and are called to salvation and to witnessing by a holy life. All are equal by virtue of Baptism. The Pope or clergy or religious have no more right or expectation of salvation than any other member. They have to strive for holiness, avoid giving in to temptation and sin, just as much as any of the rest of us. As I said last week, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council taught very urgently that there is a *universal call to holiness* — all Catholics are urged to deepen their love for Christ every day, to strive to be the saints that God wants us to be. Pope John XXIII in his spiritual memoir, *The Journal of a Soul*, states categorically how the most important day of his

spiritual life was not his election as Pope, nor his ordination as a bishop, or even as a priest; the most important day of his life was his *Baptism*, when his parents brought him to the graces of being united to Our Lord in His Church.

We should take our Baptism very seriously, whether or not we have any remembrance of it. Some of us were baptized as teenagers or young adults; others of us were baptized as very tiny babies. Either way, the *Catechism* impresses on us its importance:

**978** "... while receiving the holy Baptism that cleansed us, the forgiveness we received then was so full and complete that there remained in us absolutely nothing left to efface, neither original sin nor offences committed by our own will, nor was there left any penalty to suffer in order to expiate them. ... Yet the grace of Baptism delivers no-one from all the weakness of nature. On the contrary, we must still combat the movements of concupiscence that never cease leading us into evil."

It is *Jesus's victory over sin* that we share in when we are baptized; and it our privilege, then, as the body of the baptized, to have that union with Him that helps us defeat our weakness from fallen will and intellect, as the first

great Lenten Gospel showed us earlier. Here we see, no doubt, why Lent is also the great season of preparation for those receiving Baptism and the other Sacraments of initiation into Catholic life. (And, please, let's all keep in special prayer those students of our Chaplaincy who will receive the Sacraments in the coming weeks — this is a life-changing moment for them! And a sign of *new life* at work in Newman House. It's surely a measure of our Chaplaincy's mission being healthy that we have new Catholics coming into the Church year by year!)

Within this Church of all the baptized faithful it is right and fitting that the Church should have *good leaders*. Our Lord Jesus made this His own intention when He chose from amongst the wider group of disciples (men and women) a small number of men — 12, in fact, representing the 12 tribes of old Israel — who would be the foundation of the new Israel. These He called to Himself, and gave extra teaching and explanation to, beyond what He gave the others. We know their names; they are listed for us in the Gospels, beginning with Simon and Andrew, James

and John. This was not some loose association; these were “The Twelve” and it was a deliberate choice by Jesus. Likewise, it was a deliberate choice of Our Lord that of those 12 one would be the principal, the leader of them, Simon. Jesus purposefully re-named Him ‘Peter’ — ‘*Cephas*’ in Aramaic, which means ‘rock’ — charging Him to be the ‘rock’ on which He would build His Church. Again, this was not some leadership sought out by Simon as a way of wielding power or influence over others. If anything, if you remember, Simon Peter would rather Our Lord had not chosen Him at all for the ministry: “*Leave me, Lord, I am a sinful man,*” he said, at the very outset. But Jesus knew what He was doing; He knew whom He was choosing: a man whose conversion after his denial of Jesus would lead Him to be a faithful and compassionate leader of the apostles. The ministry of bishop, including the bishop of Rome, the Pope, extends into our own day that much-needed spiritual leadership given to the Church by Christ. We should pray for them daily — as the prayers of the Mass always do, naming both Pope and local Bishop

in the Eucharistic Prayer — for their strength to do God’s will, defending and building up the faith of the Church.

The Church also includes *consecrated men and women religious*. This state of life has also been a part of the life of the Church since very soon after her beginning: “The perfection of charity, to which all the faithful are called, entails for those who freely follow the call to consecrated life the obligation of practicing *chastity in celibacy* for the sake of the Kingdom, *poverty and obedience*” (CCC n. 915) — these are the *evangelical counsels*, Gospel values lived life-long by way of solemn profession. So many varied individuals & communities ... *hermits, monks, nuns, friars, sisters, consecrated virgins, secular institutes, societies of apostolic life* ... have grown up and enriched the Church across its 2000 yrs, living out ever-new charisms and occupying ever-new niches in the world, to bring the Gospel into each time and place. Think of the benefits *we* receive from those chaplains of ours in religious life, and from monks, nuns & friars where we might go for prayer or retreat — Tyburn Convent, Minster

Abbey, Aylesford Priory, Worth Abbey ...

Of course it is the *lay vocation* that is the most numerous in the Church. It is your role above all to translate the faith of the Church into everyday situations: being faithful to Gospel teaching and morals in family life, in the workplace, e.g. in the areas of social justice, of sexual ethics and bio-ethics. The *Catechism* has marvellous words on this:

**899** The initiative of lay Christians is necessary especially when the matter involves discovering or inventing the means for permeating social, political, and economic realities with the demands of Christian doctrine and life. This initiative is a normal element of the life of the Church: Lay believers are in the front line of Church life ...

What would a Church hierarchy be without the 1.4bn+ of lay faithful daily praying, teaching, living holy lives, striving to overcome sin and do good? The Church's bishops, priests and deacons — along with the men and women religious — are there to serve the worldwide mission of Christ, but the task to translate that into outreach, so that all may come to hear the Gospel and live by it, is the *lay* task ... *your* task. You can and must each

take seriously the rights and duties that you have been given in the Church. The *Catechism* goes on ...

**900** Since, like all the faithful, lay Christians are entrusted by God with the apostolate by virtue of their Baptism and Confirmation, they have the right and duty, individually or grouped in associations, to work so that the divine message of salvation may be known and accepted by all men throughout the earth. This duty is the more pressing when it is only through them that men can hear the Gospel and know Christ. Their activity in ecclesial communities is so necessary that, for the most part, the apostolate of the pastors cannot be fully effective without it.

This is *your* opportunity in life ... especially as many of you might one day be bringing up children, to give to them, and so to the world, this delight in God's Church, the household of Jesus Himself who is the whole Truth of life. Perhaps this is a good *lens* through which to view Lent: in what way can my *fasting, prayer, and almsgiving* lead me to be a better ambassador for Christ, a better witness to His love, a better model of Christian living? May the tempted Jesus show me how to drive away temptation, so I can live this Church season well, and make the Church herself more manifestly holy to all who encounter her in me.