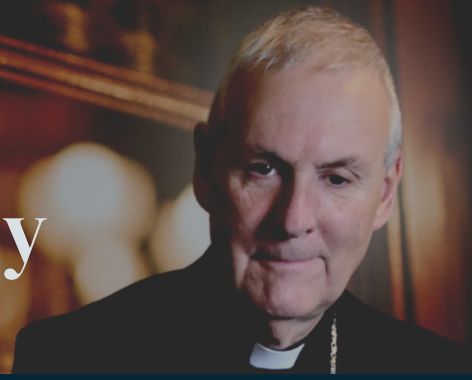




# Bishop David Oakley

Bishop of Northampton



## Letter for the First Sunday of Lent 2024

February 18 2024

### To my dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

This year, we hear a very short account of Jesus' time in the wilderness. In fact, unlike the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, Mark does not give us any detail of the temptations Jesus faced during this time in the desert. Maybe there is something very helpful to us in this. We do not have the power to change stones into bread. We would be very foolish to try throwing ourselves off high places, in the hope we would be caught by angels. And then, isn't every sin a bowing down to worship our enemy? We are simply told that our Lord was 'tempted by Satan'.

I love these encouraging words from the Letter to the Hebrews, 'For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.' (Heb 4.15-16)

We are not disciples of a Lord who stands apart from our weakness and temptations. But Jesus has overcome these temptations. And this means a powerful grace for ourselves. It means we can drink deeply from the mercy he has won for us on the throne of his glorious Cross.

What we hear in today's Gospel is very much part of our heavenly Father's loving plan of salvation. Because of the Fall, humanity fell from the life of grace. We lost our relationship of intimacy with God. And let's be honest here, we struggle to get along with each other most of the time. And so God found a way to bring us back home.

The Holy Spirit drove Jesus out into the wilderness. This sounds a bit more than just a suggestion or a hint. Jesus is compelled to go out into the desert with the loving obedience of a Heart that is totally focused on the Father's will. And this becomes our vision for the Season of Lent. This is a time of great blessing. What a gift is offered us over the coming days.

Jesus was with the wild beasts. It is relatively safe to be a Christian in our part of the world. Sadly, this is not so for every disciple of the Lord. And it wasn't for those first Christians who read this Gospel. They were being persecuted and martyred for their faith by the Roman authorities. They were keeping company with wild beasts in the circuses of the Empire.

But then we hear something else. We hear what happens when Jesus' forty days in the wilderness were over. Jesus began his Galilean ministry. He proclaimed the good news of the Kingdom. The work of bringing home the lost and suffering begins. And this work still continues today. And this mission is our task today.

I truly hope and pray, we all have a blessed and grace-filled Lent this year.

Sincerely,

**Bishop David Oakley**

Bishop of Northampton