

Temptation
Matthew 4: 1-11
Ute Koenig

*Christ did his most significant work in the time between the temptation and the crucifixion, or better said - his sacrifice.
Temptation and sacrifice belong together like night and day.*

As adults, we know temptations very well. We struggle with it almost every day. Sometimes it is alcohol, sometimes it is caffeine, or chocolate, sometimes it is another drug. It has to do with our yearnings and cravings, and with the instability of our inner balance. We mistakenly believe we come to an inner balance through fulfilling our desires. The outside world stimulates these desires hundredfold in many different forms. Mostly we think we cannot do without them and our will is too weak to battle against them on a daily basis. We each have our very own individual temptations and problems that are caused by them.

Looking at society as a whole, temptation is present everywhere. It is bigger and perhaps more dangerous than we have recognised up to now. Many people have forgotten how to differentiate between fanatical faith and faith that you develop through the experience and effectiveness of the spiritual world in our daily life. It is a tragedy. Some young people think religion has brought so much deceit, distress and warfare for mankind that it cannot be trusted. And, on the other hand, temptation has become extremely materialistic. The power of the adversary is immense and hard to resist. Most people cannot recognise the daily effectiveness and protective power of the spiritual world. In our daily struggle it could arrive through their guardian angel, or through their already deceased loved ones.

But now, we have to pose the question: is there a chance to manage this limitless temptation, in the personal and also for society, so that it is not so overwhelming? Let us return for a moment to the beginning. I said that temptation is closely connected to sacrifice. But who likes sacrifice? In a short time, we will see - in our church [in Toronto] - the tale of the Green Snake and the Beautiful Lily by Goethe. The main theme in this story is sacrifice. The pictures point us towards a distant future. At that time it will never be night. Then we will always have day. It is important that each figure has their dealings in the tale in order that the sacrifice can work. So it is also important that we prepare the future now, otherwise one day society may collapse.

One way to get ready for the future is to practice small sacrifices. Can't we try to give up something we desire intensely? For example, if we are totally addicted to chocolate, or alcohol, or other things, we could begin with that, only one time in the week. Perhaps one day we can learn how not to give in to another craving, perhaps a bigger one. Then one day, perhaps, we can resist a more intense temptation.

But how can society resist the temptation of having only materialistic thoughts without spiritual connection? Today, many people cannot distinguish between fanaticism, and the fact, indeed the reality, that the spiritual world is continuously present. One can experience that when one is a little awake to it. Through the guidance of the spiritual world a new morality is arising for which each of us is responsible. Then we can hope that we will remind ourselves about the biggest sacrifice of and for all times, the mystery of Golgotha.

It is our hope that in the future, society will achieve the right form of harmony. But, harmony is only possible when the physical and the spiritual worlds mutually interact and influence each other. The physical world connects with the spiritual world and vice versa, when antithesis of day and night are cancelled. Of course it is something for the far future, but we have to prepare it now.

If we celebrate our daily service as a community, and give up our excessive desires, our materialistic thoughts and superfluous cravings, then we are already making possible the mutual penetration of both worlds. Our small sacrifice will build the foundation and show the way to reject temptation when it comes as a dark feeling and attacks our soul.