

Monsignor Dennis Sheehan
Homily Given on February 21, 2010
1st Sunday of Lent – Liturgical Year C

The chaplain at an Ivy League college was hosting a student discussion group. The topic of the day was “Who was Jesus?” The first student question to the chaplain: “Do you think Jesus was married?” “No,” responded the chaplain, “I don’t think Jesus was married. There’s no mention of it in the Gospel”. The student persisted, “Then do you think he’d like to have been married?” “Why do you ask that that?” the chaplain inquired. The student’s answer is worth pondering. The student said, “Because if I knew Jesus was married, it might make Jesus easier to relate to”.

You can understand that student. He wanted Jesus to be like him, to be interested in his interests. It’s the constant temptation I have as a preacher. Am I “making Jesus easier to relate to”? If so, I’m in real danger of cutting Jesus down to my limits, my values, my vision. But – and today’s Lenten Gospel makes this clear – Jesus doesn’t want to be remade to suit the hearer. Jesus is fine with being odd. Jesus is fine with being tough.

Those three tests, or temptations, are all about remaking Jesus. Remake him as a stop in the food chain. Remake him as a political powerhouse. Remake him as a circus performer.

Jesus just says no. He won’t do a makeover by Satan. He’ll share the world’s hungers, not feed his face. He’ll be among the poor, the humble, the losers – not the movers and shakers of his day or ours. He’ll bring God’s kingdom by death on a cross, not by fireworks and pyrotechnics.

At bottom, Jesus says that God his Father has different ideas. One often hears it said among well-meaning people: “We all serve the same God, don’t we?” Jesus says, “No, we don’t.” He refuses the easy God, the compromising God. He wants us to do the same.

This is really good news at the beginning of Lent. Jesus refuses fame, prosperity, power – all the things Americans hold dear. He will be about saving, rescuing. He will not always be the Jesus we want. But he will always be the Jesus we need. He will knock down the cheap ideas of God and salvation and put his truth in their place. He leaves us today with a question to ponder. We say: “Doesn’t it all boil down to serving the same God?” Jesus seems to say no – God is God and will not be remade in Satan’s image – or ours.

Blessed Lent to all.