

**March 5, 2017**

**“Wilderness Training: Obstacles and Temptations”**

**First Reading ~ Matthew 4:1-11**

Then Jesus was led into the wilderness by the Spirit, to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was famished. The tempter approached and said, “If you are the Only Begotten, command these stones to turn into loaves of bread.” Jesus replied, “It is written, ‘We do not live on bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” Next the devil took Jesus to the Holy City and placed him on the parapet of the temple, and said, “If you are the Only Begotten, throw yourself down; for it is written, ‘God will tell the angels to take care of you’, and ‘With their hands they will support you, so that you may never stumble on a stone.’” Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘Do not put God to the test.’” The devil then took Jesus to a very high mountain and showed him all the dominions of the world and their splendor, promising, “All these I will give you, if you fall down and worship me.” At this, Jesus said to the devil, “Away with you, Satan! for it is written, ‘You will worship the Most High God; God alone you will adore.’” At that, the devil left, and angels came and attended Jesus.

**Second Reading ~ adapted from Richard Rohr in *Seeing Our Shadow*, in “Scripture as Spirituality”**

The shadow is that part of the self that we don't want to see, that we're always afraid of and don't want others to see either. Our tendency is to hide or deny it, even from ourselves.

One point here is crucial: The shadow self is not of itself evil; it just allows you to do evil without calling it evil. That is why Jesus criticizes hypocrisy more than anything else (eleven times in Matthew's Gospel). Something that is shocking to many religious people is that Jesus is never upset with sinners; he's only upset with people who think they are not sinners!

Archaic religion and most of the history of religion has seen the shadow as the problem. Isn't that what religion is about: getting rid of all our faults? This is the classic pattern of dealing with the symptom instead of the cause. We cannot really get rid of the shadow; we can only expose its game-- which eventually undermines its results and effects.

Low level religion almost always attacks the shadow instead of the ego, the symptom instead of the cause. And the narcissistic structure of the self remains totally in control and unexposed. This is the clever, demonic game of smoke and mirrors so that we do not have to surrender our actual false selves.

Jesus and the prophets deal with the cause itself, which is the separated, autonomous ego self; and this can take negative or positive forms, which are equally delusional: self-hatred or self-inflation. Frankly, the separated self ping-pongs between these two hiding places, and neither of them can handle the wonderful truth of Divine Identity. Our problem is not our shadow self nearly as much as our over-defended ego, which always projects its own faults onto other people and hates them there, and thus avoids its own conversion.