

## ***Homily for St Mark's Commencement Address: Bishop Mark Short***

*March 2, 2020*

*Matthew 4:1-11*

What is the making of a good theologian?

Late nights wrestling with the intricacies of systematics?

An ability to locate obscure books at bargain prices in the outer reaches of the online universe?

Coffee and friendship ..... and more coffee?

In his reflections on Psalm 119 the German Reformer Martin Luther gives a threefold answer to that question.

The first two ingredients are what we might expect.

There is prayer (*oratio*) - the humble and earnest seeking after the Holy Spirit's enlightenment.

There is meditation (*meditatio*) – the diligent reading and re-reading of Scripture in order to discern its meaning.

But it's his third ingredient that has become famous, perhaps because it is unexpected. Here Luther reaches into his native German for the right term:

Thirdly, there is *tentatio*, *Anfechtung*. This is the touchstone that teaches you not only to know and understand, but also to experience how right, how true, how sweet, how lovely, how mighty, how comforting God's Word is, wisdom beyond all wisdom.

Therefore, you see how David, in the Psalm mentioned, complains so often about all kinds of enemies, arrogant princes or tyrants, false spirits and factions that he has to put up with because he meditates, that is, because he is occupied with God's Word (as has been said) in all manner of ways. For as soon as God's Word takes root and grows in you, the devil will plague you and make a real doctor of you, and by his attacks will teach you to seek and love God's Word.

*Anfechtung* – the word mean challenge or testing. It resonates deeply with our reading from Matthew's gospel, where Jesus is led by the Spirit to be tested or tempted by the Devil. So how might this reading illuminate the role that testing might play in your own theological journey?

Here's just one suggestion testing is a vital part of the theological journey insofar as it clarifies matters of identity.

Today's gospel reading comes immediately after the account of Jesus' baptism. There he hears the voice from heaven:

“This is my Son, the Beloved,<sup>[4]</sup> with whom I am well pleased.”

Notice then how the first two tests begin.

*“If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.”*

*“If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written,*

*‘He will command his angels concerning you,’  
and ‘On their hands they will bear you up,  
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone*

Here is the challenge to Jesus – to ground His identity not in the gracious word of His heavenly Father, but somewhere else

In a miracle of provision where God feeds his hunger right then and there ...

In a miracle of deliverance where God saves Him from death right then and there...

To force the issue beyond the realm of faith into the world of sight.

The study of theology will no doubt challenge you to seek your identity in all kinds of places.

Possibly not in miracles – although there will be times when a looming deadline might make you wonder

More likely you’ll be challenged and tested to find your identity in technical mastery, or having all the answers, or de-constructing all the answers or just living the questions...

And all those experiences have their place.

But Luther would say they do us well when they point us somewhere else. To a word that God still speaks to all who come by faith to Christ:

You are my beloved son, my beloved daughter. Notwithstanding your grades, your glories and your failures, with you I am well pleased.

Luther claimed the devil’s blows will make a doctor out of the budding theologian. I rather suspect the authorities at CSU will require evidence of something more than 40 days in the wilderness in order to grant that or any other award. But if the journey is about who we are becoming not just what we are learning it’s those desert seasons that may prove to be the most transformational in the long run...

AMEN.