It is provocative to consider where Jesus is led in today’s Gospel, and by whom he was led. At the outset “…Jesus is led by the Spirit into the desert…” (Matthew 4:1) The devil, on the other hand, takes Jesus to the Temple and then to a high mountain to show Him the kingdoms of the world. I don’t know about you, but I would much rather hang out in precincts of the Temple in Jerusalem or be dazzled by great the great kingdoms, then spend time in the flinty Judean Desert. Isn’t this true even today? Doesn’t the desire to satisfy our wants draw us more toward places of glamour and power rather than to the wilderness?

In today’s reading from the second creation story in Genesis underlay same aspect. God’s first children, Adam and Eve, are placed in creation’s garden, in its original and natural state. In the garden they are provided all they need and they are close to their Father, and even walk with Him in the evening. God affirms his creation and his children when he remarks, they is “very good.” This is original, natural state is spoiled, however, when Adam and Eve fall prey to the temptation to be like gods – to be powerful, to be important, to satisfy their hungers. This is similar to the temptations we all face and is the very same temptations that Jesus faces in the desert. When subjected to these temptations Jesus doesn’t fall, how does he resist?
I believe that the key to understanding Jesus’ ability to resist these age-old temptations lies in the verse immediately before today’s Gospel selection. “And a voice came from the heavens, saying, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.’” (Matthew 3:17) Jesus’ Father affirms his true beloved identity. With his true identity established, Jesus doesn’t need to prove that he is the Son of God – he knows this at his core. Jesus doesn’t have to seek after power, prestige, or privilege. What greater privilege could one want than to be a beloved son, the Son of God?

There is one important fact for us to realize, as we enter the wilderness of our lives, and we are exposed to the glamour and attraction of evil, and are tempted to become demigods. It is that we are already beloved children of God. If I can trust the truth of God’s unconditional love, then I no longer need to prove anything. I don’t need the adulation of the crowd, because I am affirmed and sustained by God with every breath I take. I won’t need the knowledge of good and evil, for I will know that in God’s eyes, I am already “very good.” I don’t need to become powerful to protect myself, because “God is with me; with his rod and staff he comforts me.” (Cf. Psalm 23:4b) I do not need to test God’s love, because he proved his love when he “gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.” (John 3:16) I don’t need to seek after the riches of worldly kingdoms, because I already have a place at the table in the Kingdom of God for all eternity. I wonder… Have I put my place in the kingdom in jeopardy by my stumbling attempts to obey God’s law? No, because God condemns no one to hell! (Catechism #1037)

Jesus shows the forgiving nature of his Father when having suffered the effects of the worst sin, as he hung on the cross said, “Father forgive them for they know not what they do.” (Luke 23:34) When we fall prey to the tempter, we have only to accept God’s forgiveness and, with His grace, try again. Then there is only one thing left for us to do… We need to extend the same understanding and forgiveness to others that we have received. Then, the devil will leave us, and behold, our angels will minister to us.