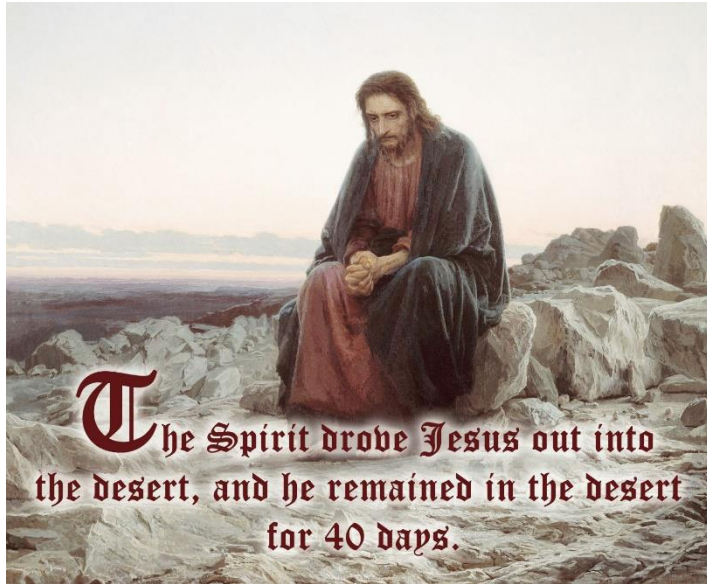


First Sunday of Lent



Temptation is not a sin but an invitation to commit sin and is part of our daily life. We cannot get rid of all temptations. We are surrounded by them. We encounter and experience them every day. No great person on earth is spared from being tempted. In fact, it might even be a prerequisite for a truly heroic life. Think of Abraham, Moses, Job, Joseph and Mary, and the saints. God makes no exceptions, not even for His own Son.

Temptation always makes sin look like a positive choice for the moment, but giving in to temptation only makes our condition worse. Temptations are coming from the devil whose purpose is to destroy and makes us away from God. The truth is, temptations remain with us until we die. Temptations cannot come from God because God is all-good and he cannot do evil acts.

Our Gospel today is on the Temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. Three temptations are recounted: to change stone into bread, to fall down and worship the devil, and to jump down from the pinnacle of the Temple. In each of these three temptations what the devil is saying to Jesus is, “Come on, use what you have to get what you want.” And in each case Jesus overcomes the temptation by replying, “No, we can only use godly means to satisfy our God-given needs or to pursue our goals in life.”

In the first temptation, Jesus had fasted for forty days in the wilderness and at the end of it he was very hungry. The devil puts an idea into his head: “**If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread**” (Luke 4:3). Notice that the first thing the devil does is sow a doubt in his mind: “**if you are the Son of God.**” “Are you really sure God is with you?” The same thing happened in the garden of Eden. The first thing the Tempter said to Eve was, “**Did God really say you should not eat of any fruit of the garden**” (Genesis 3:1). Temptation always begins with a doubting thought. Did God really say this or is it one of those Sunday school fairy tales? Jesus overcame the temptations by refusing to entertain such doubts and by standing on the word of God.

Note, secondly, that people are tempted only with what they need or want. After his fasting Jesus needed to eat. So, the devil tempted him with food. It is not a sin for Jesus to eat after fasting. The sin may lie in how the food is obtained. Should he follow the normal way of obtaining bread or should he take the shortcut suggested by the devil to obtain instant bread? Jesus refuses to take the devil's shortcut. The means we employ to satisfy our needs must be in accordance with the word of God. Feeding on God's word is ultimately more important than feeding on bread. **"It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone'"** (verse 4).

In the second temptation the devil shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and promises to give him authority over them if only Jesus would worship him. Remember that Jesus was about to begin his public life and was looking for a way to get the whole world to know him and accept his message. Again, the devil tempts him to use what he has (his heart, his soul) to get what he wants (the loyalty of the whole world). Again, Jesus says no. The end does not justify the means. **"It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him'"** (v. 8).

In the third temptation the devil asks Jesus to throw himself down from the pinnacle of the temple as a way to prove that he was the Son of God. Remember that the people were asking Jesus for a sign to prove that he was the Messiah. Jesus wanted to convince them that he was the one. But how do you do it! The devil suggested this sensational sky jump without a parachute. Again, use what you have to get what you want. Use your supernatural power to get the people to recognize you and believe in you as the Son of God, the Messiah. And again, Jesus says no. The God of Jesus Christ is not a God of the sensational but a God who works through the ordinary, everyday things of life. **"Do not put the Lord your God to the test"** (verse 12).

As someone graphically put it: "To pray against temptation but not to avoid the occasion of sin is like putting your hand in the fire and pray that the hand does not get burned."

Other occasions of sin are pornographic materials like movies, TV, Internet, magazines; places of vices, like dubious bars, dancing halls, gambling dens.

Let us learn from Jesus that the best way to prepare for our spiritual warfare is by way of prayer and fasting. As we discipline our bodies, we experience true freedom from sin, and are able to go out and reach out to people, especially to those in need. For Lent, remember AFP—Alms giving, Fasting and Prayer.

A moment with the Lord:

Lord, when tempted, help me to just pray and flee. **Amen**
