



FAITH CIRCLES

WEEKLY SMALL
GROUP CATECHESIS

1ST SUNDAY OF LENT • YEAR A



SUNDAY GOSPEL

Into Temptation

Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished.

The tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.' But he answered, 'It is written, "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."'

Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, '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." Jesus said to him, 'Again it is written, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."'

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour; and he said to him, 'All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.' Jesus said to him, 'Away with you, Satan! for it is written, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him." Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.' ■

GOSPEL REFLECTION

Pope Francis

Each year, the Gospel of the First Sunday of Lent sets before us the narrative of the temptation of Jesus, when the Holy Spirit, having descended upon him after his Baptism in the Jordan, prompts him to confront Satan openly in the desert for 40 days, before beginning his public ministry.

The tempter seeks to divert Jesus from the Father's plan, that is, from the way of sacrifice, of the love that offers itself in expiation, to make him take an easier path, one of success and power. The duel between Jesus and Satan takes place through strong quotations from Sacred Scripture. The devil, in fact, to divert Jesus from the way of the cross, sets before him false messianic hopes: economic well-being, indicated by the ability to turn stones into bread; a dramatic and miraculous style, with the idea of throwing himself down from the highest point of the Temple in Jerusalem and being saved by angels; and lastly, a shortcut to power and dominion, in exchange for an act of adoration to Satan. These are the three groups of temptations: and we, too, know them well!

Jesus decisively rejects all these temptations and reiterates his firm resolve to follow the path

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set by the Father, without any kind of compromise with sin or worldly logic. Note well how Jesus responds. He does not dialogue with Satan, as Eve had done in the earthly paradise. Jesus is well aware that there can be no dialogue with Satan, for he is cunning.

That is why Jesus, instead of engaging in dialogue as Eve had, chooses to take refuge in the Word of God and responds with the power of this Word. Let us remember this: at the moment of temptation, of our temptations, there is no arguing with Satan, our defence must always be the Word of God! And this will save us. In his replies to Satan, the Lord, using the Word of God, reminds us above all that “man

shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God”; and this gives us the strength, sustains us in the struggle against a worldly mind-set that would lower man to the level of his primitive needs, causing him to lose hunger for what is true, good and beautiful, the hunger for God and for his love.

Furthermore, he recalls that “it is written, ‘You shall not tempt the Lord your God’”, for the way of faith passes also through darkness and doubt, and is nourished by patience and persevering expectation. Lastly, Jesus recalls that “it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and him only you shall serve’”; i.e., we must rid ourselves of idols, of vain things, and build our lives on what is essential.

Jesus’ words will then be borne out in his actions. His absolute fidelity to the Father’s plan of love will lead him after about three years to the final reckoning with the “prince of this world”, at the hour of his Passion and Cross, and Jesus will have his final victory, the victory of love!

Dear brothers and sisters, the time of Lent is a propitious occasion for us all to make a journey of conversion, by sincerely allowing ourselves to be confronted with this passage of the Gospel. Let us renew the promises of our Baptism: let us renounce Satan and all his works and seductions — for he is a seducer — in order to follow the path of God and arrive at Easter in the joy of the Spirit. ■

TALKING POINTS

1. Pope Francis encourages us to turn to the Word of God in moments of temptation, as Jesus did in the Gospel. Discuss how the Word of God helps you to continue to trust and follow Jesus in your life.
2. Jesus quotes the scriptures in his response to Satan when he says, ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’ Do you think about the Word of God as food and sustenance, as necessary as bread? How can you incorporate the Word of God more into your daily prayer life?

PRAYER POINTS

Pray for each other: Ask about and pray for the needs of the group members. Individuals might pray for themselves or ask someone else to pray for them.

Reflect: Spend some time with Jesus, asking Him to reveal to you the strength and power of His love that helps us to overcome temptation.

Response: *Jesus, I trust in you.*

Closing Prayer: Loving Father, you sent your Son Jesus to show us the path of life, and the greatness of your love for us, that would withstand any trial. Help us in this season of Lent to trust you more and more, and to hold fast to our commitment to live as mirrors of your love.

