

## GOSPEL

LUKE 4:1-13

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit through the wilderness, being tempted there by the devil for forty days. During that time he ate nothing and at the end he was hungry. Then the devil said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to turn into a loaf.' But Jesus replied, 'Scripture says: Man does not live on bread alone.'

Then leading him to a height, the devil showed him in a moment of time all the kingdoms of the world and said to him, 'I will give you all this power and the glory of these kingdoms, for it has been committed to me and I give it to anyone I choose. Worship me, then, and it shall all be yours.' But Jesus answered him, 'Scripture says:

You must worship the Lord your God, and serve him alone.'

Then he led him to Jerusalem and made him stand on the parapet of the Temple. 'If you are the Son of God,' he said to him, 'throw yourself down from here, for Scripture says: He will put his angels in charge of you to guard you, and again: They will hold you up on their hands in case you hurt your foot against a stone.'

But Jesus answered him, 'It has been said: You must not put the Lord your God to the test.' Having exhausted all these ways of tempting him, the devil left him to return at the appointed time.

The Gospel of the Lord.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What are the things you truly hunger for in your life?
2. How do you make worship and service of God part of your Christian life? How might you enhance your worship and service?
3. We all face temptations, weaknesses and vulnerabilities in our life. How could you invite God to transform you, and to give you strength to face these things?

## A REFLECTION BY POPE EMERITUS BENEDICT

Last Wednesday, with the penitential Rite of Ashes we began Lent, a Season of spiritual renewal in preparation for the annual celebration of Easter.

But what does it mean to begin the Lenten journey? The Gospel for this First Sunday of Lent illustrates it for us with the account of the temptations of Jesus in the desert. The Evangelist St Luke recounts that after receiving Baptism from John, "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan, and was led by the Spirit for forty days in the wilderness, tempted by the devil". There is a clear insistence on the fact that the temptations were not just an incident on the way but rather the consequence of Jesus' decision to carry out the mission entrusted to him by the Father to live to the very end his reality as the beloved Son who trusts totally in him. Christ came into the world to set us free from sin and from the ambiguous fascination of planning our life leaving God out. He did not do so with loud proclamations but rather by fighting the Tempter himself, until the Cross. This example applies to everyone: the world is improved by starting with oneself, changing, with God's grace, everything in one's life that is not going well.

The first of the three temptations to which Satan subjects Jesus originates in hunger, that is, in material need: "If you are the Son of God command this stone to become bread". But Jesus responds with Sacred Scripture: "Man shall not live by bread alone". Then the Devil shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the earth and says: all this will be yours if, prostrating yourself, you worship me. This is the deception of power, and an attempt which Jesus was to unmask and reject: "You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve". Not adoration of power, but only of God, of truth and love. Lastly, the Tempter suggests to Jesus that he work a spectacular miracle: that he throw himself down from the pinnacle of the Temple and let the angels save him so that everyone might believe in him. However, Jesus answers that God must never be put to the test. We cannot "do an experiment" in which God has to respond and show that he is God: we must believe in him! We should not make God "the substance" of "our experiment". Still referring to Sacred Scripture, Jesus puts the only authentic criterion obedience, conformity to God's

will, which is the foundation of our existence before human criteria. This is also a fundamental teaching for us: if we carry God's word in our minds and hearts, if it enters our lives, if we trust in God, we can reject every kind of deception by the Tempter. Furthermore, Christ's image as the new Adam emerges clearly from this account. He is the Son of God, humble and obedient to the Father, unlike Adam and Eve who in the Garden of Eden succumbed to the seduction of the evil spirit, of being immortal without God.

Lent is like a long "retreat" in which to re-enter oneself and listen to God's voice in order to overcome the temptations of the Evil One and to find the truth of our existence. It is a time, we may say, of spiritual "training" in order to live alongside Jesus not with pride and presumption but rather by using the weapons of faith: namely prayer, listening to the Word of God and penance. In this way we shall succeed in celebrating Easter in truth, ready to renew our baptismal promises. May the Virgin Mary help us so that, guided by the Holy Spirit, we may live joyfully and fruitfully this Season of grace.

## REFLECTION QUESTION

- What has struck you from this reflection by Pope Emeritus Benedict?

## PRAYER

*Spend some time in prayer with one another*

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God
4. Prayer for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.