

## GOSPEL

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.'

## A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

In this First Sunday of Lent, the Gospel introduces us to the journey toward Easter, revealing Jesus as he remains in the desert for 40 days, subjected to the temptations of the devil. This episode takes place at a precise moment in Jesus' life: immediately after his Baptism in the River Jordan and prior to his public ministry. He has just received the solemn investiture: the Spirit of God has descended upon him, the heavenly Father has declared him "my beloved Son". Jesus is now ready to begin his mission; and as this mission has a declared enemy, namely, Satan, He confronts him straight away, "up close". The devil plays precisely on the title "Son of God" in order to deter Jesus from the fulfillment of his mission: "If you are the Son of God"; and proposes

that He perform miraculous acts — to be a "magician" — such as transforming stones into bread so as to satiate his hunger, and throwing himself down from the temple wall so as to be saved by the angels. These two temptations are followed by the third: to worship him, the devil, so as to have dominion over the world.

Through this three-fold temptation, Satan wants to divert Jesus from the way of obedience and humiliation — because he knows that in this way, on this path, evil will be conquered — and to lead Him down the false shortcut to success and glory. But the devil's poisonous arrows are "blocked" by Jesus with the shield of God's Word, which expresses the will of the Father. Jesus does not speak a word of his own: He responds only with the Word of God. Thus, the Son, filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, comes out of the desert victorious.

During the 40 days of Lent, as Christians we are invited to follow in Jesus' footsteps and face the spiritual battle with the Evil One with the strength of the Word of God. Not with our words: they are worthless. The Word of God: this has the strength to defeat Satan. For this reason, it is important to be familiar with the Bible: read it often, meditate on it, assimilate it. The Bible contains the Word of God, which is always timely and effective. Someone has asked: what would happen were we to treat the Bible as we treat our mobile phone?; were we to always carry it with us, or at least a small, pocket-sized Gospel, what would happen?; were we to turn back when we forget it: you forget your mobile phone — 'oh! I don't have it, I'm going back to look for it'; were we to open it several times a day; were we to read God's messages contained in the Bible as we read telephone messages, what would happen? Clearly the comparison is paradoxical, but it calls for reflection. Indeed, if we had God's Word always in our heart, no temptation could separate us from God, and no obstacle could divert us from the path of good; we would know how to defeat the daily temptations of the evil that is within us and outside us; we would be more capable of living a life renewed

according to the Spirit, welcoming and loving our brothers and sisters, especially the weakest and neediest, and also our enemies.

May the Virgin Mary, perfect icon of obedience to God and of unconditional trust in his will, sustain us on the Lenten journey, that we may set ourselves to listen docilely to the Word of God in order to achieve a true conversion of heart.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What are the temptations that draw you away from God or living the kind of life God desires for you?
- Jesus went through his temptations 'in the wilderness' — in a time of scarcity. Have you felt such wilderness / times of scarcity in your life? What was this like when also being faced with temptation?
- Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit to confront and overcome his temptations. In what ways have you felt the Spirit's guidance and support through periods of temptation, making you stronger or more resilient.

## 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. Pray 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.