

GOSPEL

Matthew 4:1-11

Jesus was led by the Spirit out into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, after which he was very hungry, and the tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to turn into loaves.' But he replied, 'Scripture says: Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'

The devil then took him to the holy city and made him stand on the parapet of the Temple. 'If you are the Son of God,' he said, 'throw yourself down; for scripture says: He will put you in his angels' charge, and they will support you on their hands in case you hurt your foot against a stone.'

Jesus said to him, 'Scripture also says: You must not put the Lord your God to the test.'

Next, taking him to a very high mountain, the devil showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. 'I will give you all these,' he said, 'if you fall at my feet and worship me.' Then Jesus replied, 'Be off, Satan! For scripture says: You must worship the Lord your God, and serve him alone.'

Then the devil left him, and angels appeared and looked after him.

A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

9 March 2014

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 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.

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REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/ Homily?



Head: How do you think knowledge of scripture, the Word of God, helps us defeat temptation?



Heart: “The way of faith passes also through darkness and doubt”. Have you experienced doubt in your faith journey? What happened and what did you do?



Hands: What are some ways we can bring the Word of God more into our lives this Lent?

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. Offer 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 praying the ‘Glory Be’.