

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.

A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

The Gospel passage for this first Sunday of Lent recounts the experience of the temptation of Jesus in the desert. After fasting for 40 days, Jesus is tempted three times by the devil. First he invites Him to change stone into bread; then, from above, he shows Him all the kingdoms of the world and the prospect of becoming a powerful and glorious messiah; lastly he takes Him to the pinnacle of the temple of Jerusalem and invites Him to throw himself down, so as to manifest His divine power in a spectacular way. The three temptations point to three paths that the world always offers, promising great success, three paths to mislead us: greed for

possession — to have, have, have —, human vainglory and the exploitation of God. These are three paths that will lead us to ruin.

The first, the path of greed for possession. This is always the devil's insidious logic. He begins from the natural and legitimate need for nourishment, life, fulfilment, happiness, in order to encourage us to believe that all this is possible without God, or rather, even despite Him. But Jesus countervails, stating: "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone'". Recalling the long journey of the chosen people through the desert, Jesus affirms his desire to fully entrust himself to the providence of the Father, who always takes care of his children.

The second temptation: the path of human vainglory. The devil says: "If you, then, will worship me, it shall all be yours". One can lose all personal dignity if one allows oneself to be corrupted by the idols of money, success and power, in order to achieve one's own self-affirmation. And one tastes the euphoria of a fleeting joy. And this also leads us to be 'peacocks', to vanity, but this vanishes. For this reason Jesus responds: "You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve".

And then the third temptation: exploiting God to one's own advantage. In response to the devil — who, citing Scripture, invites Him to seek a conspicuous miracle from God — Jesus again opposes with the firm decision to remain humble, to remain confident before the Father: "It is said, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God'". Thus, he rejects perhaps the most subtle temptation: that of wanting to 'pull God to our side', asking him for graces which in reality serve and will serve to satisfy our pride.

These are the paths that are set before us, with the illusion that in this way one can obtain success and happiness. But in reality, they are completely extraneous to God's mode of action; rather, in fact they distance us from God, because they are the works of Satan. Jesus, personally facing these trials, overcomes temptation three times in order to fully adhere to the Father's plan. And he reveals the remedies to us: interior life, faith in God, the certainty of his love — the certainty

that God loves us, that he is Father, and with this certainty we will overcome every temptation.

But there is one thing to which I would like to draw your attention, something interesting. In responding to the tempter, Jesus does not enter a discussion, but responds to the three challenges with only the Word of God. This teaches us that one does not dialogue with the devil; one must not discuss, one only responds to him with the Word of God.

Therefore, let us benefit from Lent as a privileged time to purify ourselves, to feel God's comforting presence in our life. May the maternal intercession of the Virgin Mary, icon of faithfulness to God, sustain us in our journey, helping us to always reject evil and welcome good.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What are the things you truly hunger for in your life?
- How do you make worship and service of God part of your Christian life? How might you enhance your worship and service?
- 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?

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.