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Meditations: Sunday of the First Week of Lent (Year C)

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during this time of Lent.

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- Jesus accompanies us in our trials
- The tempter seeks to undermine our divine filiation
- The devil wants to make us distrust God

EVERY YEAR, on the first Sunday of Lent, the Church invites us to meditate on the temptations that Jesus endured. Perhaps the first time we heard this account we were surprised that God made man was tested in this way. Jesus accepts this, among other reasons, so that even when we undergo temptations we can be sure of his company and understanding. This is what happened, for example, to Saint Catherine of Siena. After a night of intense suffering, she asked: “My Lord, where were you when my heart was tormented with so many temptations?” And she heard the reply: “I was in the depths of your heart.”^[1]

Jesus fights within us, with us and for us. *I will be with him in tribulation, I will rescue him and honor him (Ps 91:15)*, the Lord says in the words of the psalmist. What peace it gives us to know that we can undergo our

temptations together with Jesus!
“Certainly Christ was tempted by the devil. In Christ you were tempted,” Saint Augustine says, “for Christ received his flesh from your nature, but by his own power gained salvation for you. He suffered death in your nature, but by his own power gained glory for you. Therefore, He suffered temptation in your nature, but by his own power gained victory for you.”^[2]

Sometimes, when thinking about our own weakness, we can be filled with sadness. But Christ, who was perfect God and perfect Man, also wanted to undergo temptations; He wanted to go to this extreme in order to accompany us. “Our Lord is our model. And being God, He allowed himself to be tempted, so that we would be encouraged, so that we would be sure – with Him – of victory. If you feel trepidation in your soul, in those moments speak to

your God and tell Him: have mercy on me, Lord, because all my bones tremble, and my soul is sorely troubled (*Ps 6:2-3*). It will be He who will tell you: do not be afraid, because I have redeemed you and called you by your name: you are mine (*Is 43:1*).”^[3] —

IF YOU ARE the Son of God (Lk 4,3): this is how the devil begins tempting Jesus, on two occasions. Those who jeered at Him on the Cross insulted Him with the same words. These temptations seek to undermine Jesus' status as the Son of God, to put it in doubt. The devil attacks where he can do the most harm; he puts in doubt the deepest truths. Obviously, some temptations invite us to laziness, to anger, to comfort-seeking... But behind these traps our very condition as children of God is

put in question. “Slavery or divine sonship, this is the dilemma we face. Children of God or slaves to pride, to sensuality, to the fretful selfishness which seems to afflict so many souls.”^[4] —

The remedy, therefore, is to return again and again to the reality that we are God’s children. Our consolation is the confidence in what God can do who, as a good Father, wants the best for us. In a child’s eyes, difficulties are nothing more than moments when it becomes clear who his father is. Certainly, they may be less pleasant moments, but a child knows that this is something temporary, with the security that peace will soon come again. Indeed, temptations can help us remember that we need God, that we are not self-sufficient, and that we need to cry out to Him to deliver us from evil. Thus, for those who have recourse to God’s help, “the temptations and hindrances that

the devil places help them more; because it is his Majesty who fights for them.”^[5] —

“LIKE A COMPETENT GENERAL besieging a fort, the devil studies the weak points of the person he is trying to defeat.”^[6] — However, with the certainty that God is stronger, during this season of Lent we can focus on the signs of his love for us, which He has shown us in his Son. We want to contemplate even the smallest gesture of Christ as He walks towards Jerusalem to give his life for us. But the tempter tries to lie to us and make us doubt God’s goodness. He did so with our first parents, and also with the new Adam. “Don’t trust God,” he whispers to us. “If He were really your Father, you wouldn’t go hungry, you wouldn’t have problems, you wouldn’t be on the cross.”

The devil tempted our Lord saying: *If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread (Lk 4:3)*. And Jesus has become bread for us so that we may never lack the food that gives life. The devil also tempted our Lord saying: *If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here (Lk 4:10)*. And God did not want to prevent the death of his Son, in order to save us. In reality, in each temptation the devil seeks to persuade us with the greatest lie in history: to convince us that God does not love us, that God is deceiving us.

We can ask Mary, with words of Saint Josemaría, for the courage, despite our own weakness, that comes from knowing we are children. “Mother! Call her again and again. She is listening, she sees you in danger perhaps, and with her Son’s grace she, your holy Mother Mary, offers you the refuge of her arms, the tenderness of her embrace. Call her,

and you will find yourself with added strength for the new struggle.”^[7] —

[1] Saint Catherine of Siena, *Dialogue*, Part II, chap. 3.

[2] Saint Augustine, Commentary on Psalm 60.

[3] Saint Josemaria, *Letters 2*, no. 20.

[4] Saint Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 38.

[5] Saint Teresa, *Book of Foundations*, 11, 7.

[6] Saint Thomas Aquinas, *On the Lord's Prayer*.

[7] Saint Josemaria, *The Way*, no. 516.

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