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

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the first week of Lent. The topics are: Jesus accompanies us in our weaknesses; temptations seek to weaken our divine filiation; the devil wants to undermine our trust in God.

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- Jesus accompanies us in our weaknesses

- Temptations seek to weaken our divine filiation
 - The devil wants to undermine our trust in God
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EVERY YEAR on the first Sunday of Lent, the Church invites us to meditate on the temptations that Jesus endured. The first time we heard the story, we may have been surprised that God Himself, become man, was tested in this way. Jesus accepted being tempted, among other reasons, to assure us of his company and understanding when we face temptation. Saint Catherine of Siena experienced this after a night of intense suffering. She asked, “My Lord, where were you when my heart was troubled with so many temptations?” And she heard the response, “I was in your very heart.”^[1]

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Jesus fights within us, with us, and for us. Christ does not distance Himself when we experience weakness. On the contrary, He is the *savior*, and thus when we accept our condition humbly and ask for his help, He reaches out his hand and invites us not to fear the struggle. *The Lord is good and upright, the psalmist exclaims, therefore he shows sinners the way, guides the humble in justice, and teaches the humble his way (Ps 25:8-9).* Saint Augustine writes:

“Christ was tempted by the devil, and in Christ, you were tempted, because Christ took your flesh and gave you his salvation, took your mortality and gave you his life, took from you the insults and gave you honors, and now takes your temptation to give you victory.”^[2] —

Considering our weakness might sometimes make us sad. But Christ, who was perfect God and perfect man, chose to let Himself be *tempted*

by Satan (Mk 1:13) too. He chose to cross that threshold to accompany us. “The Lord is our model; and thus, being God, He allowed Himself to be tempted so that we may be filled with courage, so that we may be sure – with Him – of victory. If you feel the trembling of your soul in those moments, speak to your God and say: have mercy on me, Lord, for all my bones are troubled, and my soul is greatly troubled (Ps 6:3-4). He will tell you: do not be afraid because I have redeemed you and called you by name; you are mine (Is 43:1).”^[3] —

IF YOU are the Son of God... (Mt 4:3). The devil tempts Jesus with these words on two occasions. The people who brought Him to the Cross insulted Him with the same phrase. These temptations are related to divine filiation: they are meant to

weaken and cast doubt upon it. The devil attacks where he can cause the most harm, questioning the deepest truths about ourselves. Some temptations, certainly, are to laziness, anger, or comfort-seeking, but behind those nets is the trap of questioning our condition as children of God. “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 Curé of Ars taught that “there is no middle ground between hell and fleeing [from sin].”^[5] The remedy, then, is to go back to our identity as children of God. Our trust in God’s power consoles us; He is a good Father who wants the best for his children. When we look at difficulties from the perspective of children of God, they are merely moments to become more convinced

of our Father's identity. They are unpleasant moments, undoubtedly, but as children we know that they are temporary and that peace will follow. Temptations can help us remember that we need God, that we are not self-sufficient, and that we need to cry out for the Lord to deliver us from evil. Thus, for people who call on God for help, "the temptation and obstacles that the devil puts in their way only help help them more, because the Lord fights for them."^[6]

"LIKE A skilled general besieging a fortress, the devil studies the weak points of the man he seeks to defeat."^[7] We know that God is stronger, however, and during Lent we can pay greater attention to the signs of his love for us, in the Person of his Son. We want to notice even

Christ's smallest gestures walking toward Jerusalem to give his life for humanity. The tempter, however, tries to deceive us and make us suspicious of God's goodness. He did this with our first parents and with the new Adam: "Do not trust God," he whispers. "If He were truly your Father, you would not go hungry, you would not have problems, you would not be on the cross."

The devil tempted Jesus, telling Him, *If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread* (Mt 4:3), and Jesus has become bread so that we never lack the food that gives life. The devil also told Him, *If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here* (Lk 4:9), but God did not want to prevent the death of his Son to save us. In every temptation, the devil tries to persuade us to believe the greatest scam in history: that God does not want us, that He deceives us.

We can ask Mary for the courage to recognize ourselves as children when we feel our weakness, because we want to enjoy God's love. In Saint Josemaría's words, "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."^[8] —

^[1] — Saint Catherine of Siena, *Dialogue*, Part II, chap. III.

^[2] — Saint Augustine, *Commentary on Psalm 60*.

^[3] — Saint Josemaría, *Letters* 2, no. 20.

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

[5] Saint John Vianney, Sermon on perseverance.

[6] Saint Teresa of Avila, *The Book of Her Foundations*, 11, 7.

[7] Saint Thomas Aquinas, *On the Our Father*.

[8] Saint Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 516.

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