

Commentary on the Gospel: Temptations

Gospel for the First Sunday of Lent (Cycle C) and commentary.

Gospel (*Lk* 4: 1-13)

And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan, and was led by the Spirit for forty days in the wilderness, tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing in those days; and when they were ended, he was hungry. The devil said to him,

“If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.”

And Jesus answered him,

“It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone.’”

And the devil took him up, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said to him,

“To you I will give all this authority and their glory; for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. If you, then, will worship me, it shall all be yours.”

And Jesus answered him,

“It is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.’”

And he took him to Jerusalem, and set him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to him,

“If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here; for it is written, ‘He will give his angels

charge of you, to guard you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’”

And Jesus answered him,

“It is said, ‘You shall not tempt the Lord your God.’”

And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.

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Commentary

We begin the time of Lent by recalling the forty days that Jesus fasted in the desert before beginning his public life. The people of Israel, freed from slavery in Egypt, were tempted in the desert on their journey to the promised land. Where

they fell, Jesus triumphs, and gives us an example of how to triumph.

Saint Luke tells us that Jesus “was led by the Spirit for forty days in the wilderness, tempted by the devil” (vv. 1-2). Being tempted wasn’t an obstacle he met on his path; rather it was foreseen in God’s plans so we would realize that, like Him, we too will be tempted.

Jesus is hungry and the devil, who is always lying in wait, takes advantage of this to test him. Some days before, when being baptized by John, Jesus heard a voice from heaven saying “Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased” (*Lk* 3:22). Could this be true? The devil draws attention to his urgent physical need for food and, trying to find out whether he is truly the Son of God, tempts him to resolve this need by using divine power. It is an insidious provocation, and one very relevant

for today's world. When so many people are going hungry and so many social emergencies are crying out for a solution, shouldn't the Church, and even God himself, be concerned first about what is urgent, and leave the rest for later? Jesus shows us the best path for solving these needs. Only an upright and good heart, nourished by God's word, can give rise to creative and effective solutions.

The devil then offers him all the world's power and glory, if only he will adore him. He tries to stir up the desire for dominion and authority to pervert his spiritual mission. It is the insidious temptation to make use of temporal power to establish God's kingdom on earth, a temptation that the Church too has faced down through the centuries. The question is still an important one. What means should be employed to make messianic hopes a reality? What does

Christianity offer the world to solve its problems? In reality, it is something quite simple, and never a political or social regime. What it offers the world is knowledge of the true God. “You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve” (v. 8), Jesus replies. The kingdoms built by the ambition for human power soon crumble. Only when God is acknowledged as Creator and the laws of nature are respected is mankind’s true good attained.

Finally, the devil tempts him to do something spectacular that will amaze the teeming crowds in the Temple of Jerusalem. He goads him to throw himself from the highest tower, so that angels will come and stop his fall before the astonished eyes of the spectators. This will ensure his immediate acclaim as the Messiah, the sign that he has been sent by the Lord. This temptation is

also very relevant for a frequent concern today. How can we recognize God? How can we believe in him unless we receive an extraordinary sign? Don't we need to experience his existence? In reality, anyone who approaches God as though he were an object in a laboratory experiment will never find him. Faced with intellectual arrogance, Jesus replies with humility: "You shall not tempt the Lord your God" (v. 12).

*The Gospel text is from the RSV
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