

Scripture Study

First Sunday of Lent – Cycle A



Opening prayer

Genesis 2:7-9; 3:1-7

(Ps 51:3-6,12-13,17)

Romans 5:12-19

Matthew 4:1-11

Overview of the Gospel:

- As we begin the penitential season of Lent, this Sunday's Gospel reading shows Jesus right after his baptism by John in the Jordan River being led into the wilderness to confront Satan.
- Jesus' forty days of trial in the wilderness recalls that of the Old Testament patriarch Moses (Exodus 24:18, 34:28) and of the prophet Elijah (1 Kings 19:5-8).
- Jesus' experience also reflects Israel's forty year "testing" (temptation) in the desert (Exodus 17:1-9; Numbers 14:1-38; Psalm 95:8-11), the difference being that Jesus, in accepting God's will, passes the test without rebelling against God. Jesus answers the devil with quotes from the book of Deuteronomy, which in part tells the story of Israel's sojourn in the wilderness (verse 4—Deuteronomy 8:3; verse 7—Deuteronomy 6:16; verse 10—Deuteronomy 6:13).
- Jesus was tempted like us (Hebrews 4:15), but not like us (James 1:13,15; 1 John 3:5). In combating temptation, Jesus relied on his human will rather than his divine will; even so, the devil could only *externally* tempt him, so intent was he to do the will of God.

Questions:

- In the 1st Reading, Eve, and then Adam, are tempted by Satan to disobey God. What do you think was the root cause of their sin?
- In the 2nd Reading, what is the point St. Paul is trying to make? How does the sin of the first Adam compare with the grace given through the sacrifice of Jesus, the Second Adam?
- In the Gospel, what links these temptations with the baptism of Jesus (verses 1, 3, 6)?
- For each of these three temptations: (a) What is its nature, (b) what might potentially appeal to Jesus' human nature, (c) what price would there be for him to yield, and (d) how does Jesus respond?
- Inasmuch as Jesus, as a divine Person, could not sin, what was the point in tempting him? How do you relate this passage to the petition of Christ's own prayer, "lead us not into temptation"?
- What spiritual benefit can be gained through temptation, and why would the Holy Spirit lead you (or allow you to go) where you would have to face it (James 1:2-4)?
- What human need is at the heart of each of these temptations? How are these needs evident in your life? How does Satan use them to tempt you?
- How have you tested God or presumed on his care for you? What do Jesus' replies to Satan tell you about the attitude you should foster towards God's care for you?

Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 538, 566, 2119, 1438

Closing Prayer

Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass readings this week!

Occupy your mind with good thoughts, or the enemy will fill them with bad ones. Unoccupied, they cannot be.
-St. Thomas More

Jesus fasted forty days and forty nights and was tempted by the devil

Gospel Reading: *Matthew 4:1-11*

Meditation: What motivated Jesus to spend 40 days and nights of solitude, prayer and fasting in the Judean wilderness? For the chosen people of Israel the desert was a place of testing, encounter, and renewal. When the Israelites were freed from slavery in Egypt, they wandered 40 years in the wilderness. This was seen as a time of purification and preparation for entry into the Promised Land. Moses went to the mountain of the Lord at Sinai and stayed there for 40 days and nights in prayer and fasting (Exodus 24:18). Elijah, after he was fed with bread from heaven, journeyed without any food for 40 days to the mountain of God. (1 Kings 19:8). Jesus journeyed without any food to the wilderness for 40 days to prepare himself for the mission that the Father had sent him to accomplish.

Why did Jesus choose such a barren, lonely place for an intense and long period of sustained prayer and fasting? Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell us in their gospel accounts that Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness. Mark states it most emphatically: “The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness” (Mark 1:12). What compelled Jesus to seek solitude, away from his family and friends, for such a lengthy period? Was it simply a test to prepare him for his mission? Or did Satan want to lure him into a trap? The word *tempt* in English usually means to entice someone to do what is wrong or forbidden. The scriptural word used here also means *test* in the sense of proving and purifying someone to see if there are ready for the task at hand. On many occasions God tested Abraham to prove his faith and to strengthen his hope in God's promises. Abraham obeyed willingly even when God asked him to sacrifice Isaac, the son of promise. When the Israelites were sorely tested in Egypt for more than 400 years, they did not forget God. They kept God's word and



remembered his promise to bring them freedom from their enemies.

Jesus was no exception to this pattern of testing. He went to the desert without food or shelter. Adam and Eve had everything they needed in the Garden of Paradise. But they ate of the forbidden fruit out of disobedience because they trusted in themselves rather than in God (Genesis 2:16-17; 3:1-6). They were cast out of Paradise and driven into the wilderness. Jesus freely enters the wilderness in order to regain Paradise for those who lost it. Jesus refuses food to show his dependence on the bread of heaven, the word of God, that would sustain him not only in his physical hunger, but in his hour of temptation as well. When Satan tempts Jesus to turn stones into bread, Jesus replies with the words of scripture, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (quote from Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:4).

Where did Jesus find the strength to survive the desert's harsh conditions and the tempter's seduction? He fed on God's word and found strength in doing his Father's will. Satan will surely tempt us and he will try his best to get us to choose our will over God's will. If he can't make us renounce our faith or sin mortally, he will then try to get us to make choices that will lead us, little by little, away from what God wants for us.

Jesus was tempted like us and he overcame sin not by his own human effort but by the grace and strength which his Father gave to him. He had to renounce his will for the will of his Father. He succeeded because he wanted to please his Father and he trusted that his Father would give him the strength to overcome the obstacles that stood in the way. Luke says that Jesus was “full of the Holy Spirit” (Luke 4:1). When tempted by the devil Jesus did not try to fight his adversary on his own human strength. He relied on the power which the Spirit gave him. Jesus came to overthrow the evil one who held us captive to sin and fear of death (Hebrews 2:14). His obedience to his Father's will and his willingness to embrace the cross reversed the curse of Adam's disobedience. His victory over sin and death won for us not only pardon for our sins but adoption as sons and daughters of God.

How can we overcome sin and oppression in our personal lives? The Lord Jesus gives us his Holy Spirit to help us in our weakness (Romans 8:26) and to be our guide and consoler in temptation and testing (1 Corinthians 10:13). The Lord gives grace to the humble who acknowledge their dependence on him (James 4:6) and he helps us to stand against the attacks of our enemy, Satan, who seeks to destroy us (1 Peter 5:8-10; Ephesians 6:10-18). The Lord Jesus is ever ready to pour out his Spirit upon us that we may have the strength and courage we need to resist sin and to reject the lies and deceits of Satan. God wants us to “fight the good fight of the faith” (1 Timothy 6:12) with the power and strength which comes from the Holy Spirit. Do you rely on the Lord for your strength and help?

“Lord Jesus, your word is life and joy for me. Fill me with your Holy Spirit that I may have the strength and courage to embrace your will in all things and to renounce whatever is contrary to it.”

