

6. March 2022

The temptations of Jesus

Lk 4:1-13

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert, for forty days being put to the test by the devil. During that time he ate nothing and at the end he was hungry. Then the devil said to him, 'If you are Son of God, tell this stone to turn into a loaf.' But Jesus replied, 'Scripture says: Human beings live not 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 their splendour, for it has been handed over to me, for me to give it to anyone I choose. Do homage, then, to me, and it shall all be yours.' But Jesus answered him, 'Scripture says: You must do homage to the Lord your God, him alone you must serve.' Then he led him to Jerusalem and set him on the parapet of the Temple. 'If you are Son of God,' he said to him, 'throw yourself down from here, for scripture says: He has given his angels orders about you, to guard you, and again: They will carry you in their arms in case you trip over a stone.' But Jesus answered him, 'Scripture says: Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' Having exhausted every way of putting him to the test, the devil left him, until the opportune moment.

Jesus, who became man to redeem us, not only consciously entered our human history through His Birth and Baptism, but also rejected for us the temptations of the devil.

Let us remember that in Paradise man was tempted by the devil, to rob him of his state of grace and involve him in the rebellion of the fallen angels against God.

In today's Gospel, the Tempter approaches the Son of God to make him fall. Let's take a closer look at each of the devil's temptations and how Jesus rejected them.

Before beginning his public life, Jesus had fasted for forty days in the desert. This event is reminiscent, both in location and duration, of the forty years the Israelites spent in the desert before entering the Promised Land. Before Jesus had finished his fast, when he was already beginning to feel hungry, the Tempter came to propose to him that, by means of a miracle, he should put an end to the fast at once. At the same time he wanted to entice Jesus to give him proof that he was the Son of God: "*If you are Son of God, tell this stone to turn into a loaf.*"

Here the boldness and presumption of the devil becomes evident. He makes a demand on Jesus, as if he had the right to claim proof. He presents himself disguised

in the mask of piety, wanting Jesus, weakened after his long fast, to yield to his natural desire. And in the same temptation he challenges him to prove his divine sonship, in which the subtle attempt to make Jesus fall into an act of pride can be identified. The Lord was similarly tempted on the cross, when they cried out to him that, if he was the Son of God, he should come down from the cross (Mt 27:40).

But Jesus does not yield to temptation. He does not break his fast or perform a miracle to prove to the devil that he is the Son of God. On the contrary, he teaches him a lesson: *"Human beings live not on bread alone"*. We can complement this statement of Jesus with the one in Matthew's Gospel: *"... but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."* (Mt 4:4) With these words, Jesus refers back to God and reminds the devil what is true life and what is man's relationship to God. We live by Him, by His every word. Thus, any trace of boastfulness and pride loses its ground.

In the second temptation, the devil shows him the kingdoms of the earth and says: *"I will give you all this power and their splendour, for it has been handed over to me, for me to give it to anyone I choose. Do homage, then, to me, and it shall all be yours."* But Jesus answered him, *'Scripture says: You must do homage to the Lord your God, him alone you must serve.'*

Here the devil's intention comes out clearly. Now he no longer hides behind a mask of piety. What he wants is to be worshipped and, in return, he offers the kingdoms over which he has influence. According to the narrative in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus does not simply respond to this temptation by quoting a passage of Scripture to unmask the devil's intentions; rather, he forcefully commands him to depart: *"Away with you, Satan! For scripture says: The Lord your God is the one to whom you must do homage, him alone you must serve."* (Mt 4:10)

With Jesus' help, we can identify and reject the devil's temptations, even when he presents himself to us disguised as an angel of light (2 Cor 11:14). After all, his intentions are always the same, even if he uses different methods. The intention behind all of Satan's temptations is to take the place of God. To do this, he seeks out man's weak points, seducing him in his carnality, his vanity or his desire for power.

The third temptation also makes clear what the devil's intention is: *"If you are Son of God," he said to him, 'throw yourself down from here, for scripture says: He has given his angels orders about you, to guard you, and again: They will carry you in their arms in case you trip over a stone.'*

Again the devil seeks to conceal his intention, this time by quoting a word of Scripture. But the Lord's answer is clear: *"Scripture says: Do not put the Lord your God to the test."*

Indeed, miracles have another meaning. They are not to be used for all to see the greatness of the one who performs them. They are a work of God through which He manifests His power. Certainly God can also use miracles to confirm the authenticity of the one sent by Him. But it is not the sent ones who can use them to accredit themselves to others.

But we have read that Jesus rejected all these temptations, and the devil had to stay away from Him for a while. This gives us the courage to face the temptations that come, not just as inevitable suffering, but knowing that by resisting we are strengthened in the fight against evil. Let us ask God to purify us deeply, so that we will not be so easily tempted and that we will perceive in our spirit when the devil wants to lead us astray from God's way, so that we can resist him in the name of Jesus: Vade retro, Satana!

In connection with these words with which the Lord rejected the devil, we would like to recommend to you the chant of the prayer of St. Benedict, which is certainly a powerful weapon in the fight against temptation: "May the Holy Cross be my light; may the dragon never be my guide. Step back, Satan!"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KGiwGcmBv1Q>