



26. September 2022

Trials

Job 1:6-22

One day when the sons of God came to attend on the Lord, among them came Satan. So the Lord said to Satan, 'Where have you been?' 'Prowling about on earth,' he answered, 'roaming around there.' So the Lord asked him, 'Did you pay any attention to my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth: a sound and honest man who fears God and shuns evil.' 'Yes,' Satan said, 'but Job is not God-fearing for nothing, is he? Have you not put a wall round him and his house and all his domain? You have blessed all he undertakes, and his flocks throng the countryside. But stretch out your hand and lay a finger on his possessions: then, I warrant you, he will curse you to your face.' 'Very well,' the Lord said to Satan, 'all he has is in your power. But keep your hands off his person.' So Satan left the presence of the Lord.

On the day when Job's sons and daughters were eating and drinking in their eldest brother's house, a messenger came to Job. 'Your oxen', he said, 'were at the plough, with the donkeys grazing at their side, when the Sabaeans swept down on them and carried them off, and put the servants to the sword: I alone have escaped to tell you.' He had not finished speaking when another messenger arrived. 'The fire of God', he said, 'has fallen from heaven and burnt the sheep and shepherds to ashes: I alone have escaped to tell you.' He had not finished speaking when another messenger arrived. 'The Chaldaean', he said, 'three bands of them, have raided the camels and made off with them, and put the servants to the sword: I alone have escaped to tell you.' He had not finished speaking when another messenger arrived. 'Your sons and daughters', he said, 'were eating and drinking at their eldest brother's house, when suddenly from the desert a gale sprang up, and it battered all four corners of the house which fell in on the young people. They are dead: I alone have escaped to tell you.' Then Job stood up, tore his robe and shaved his head. Then, falling to the ground, he prostrated himself and said: Naked I came from my mother's womb, naked I shall return again. The Lord gave, the Lord has taken back. Blessed be the name of Lord! In all this misfortune Job committed no sin, and he did not reproach God.

There are several passages in Scripture that relate an encounter between God and some fallen angel. In the New Testament, such encounters are usually quite brief. In the desert, for example, the Lord forcefully rejects Satan (cf. Mt 4:3-11); the demons are

forced to retreat wherever they meet Him; in one particular case, they ask permission to enter the pigs, which then end up throwing themselves over the precipice (cf. Mk 5:12-13).

Exorcists sometimes mention that they engage in conversations with demons, in which the demons manifest themselves.

However, it must be said that, on a general level, this area related to the "depths of Satan" (cf. Rev 2:24) is a subject that has to be handled with due objectivity and prudence, and that one must guard against any "fascination of evil," lest darkness, in one way or another, exert its influence.

Today's reading is certainly not so easy to understand, because, at first glance, it seems incomprehensible that God would give Satan permission to tempt Job. But we must remember that also in Paradise, when man was still living in a state of innocence, the fallen angel was allowed to tempt him (cf. Gen 3:1-6). Since nothing happens without God and everything is inserted in His plan of salvation, even these realities, which are difficult to understand, must have their profound meaning.

At first, it would seem that God has to prove to Satan that Job really is faithful to Him. However, this assumption is wrong, because God's judgment on a person is independent of the opinion of creatures, even more so in the case of the Tempter. But God knows how to integrate the power of evil into His plan of salvation, and, in fact, this is a special aspect of His Omnipotence. Let us remember that the Devil, like everything created by God, was originally good. It is not that he was created evil, nor did he arise by himself as a kind of "destructive anti-force", as some false doctrines pretend to tell us.

As a rational creature, God endowed the angels with the gift of freedom, so that they could respond to His love, serve Him and participate in His glory, like all creatures. Indeed, true love needs freedom as its foundation. But Lucifer and his followers abused this freedom. Thus, the angel became Satan, that is, the adversary.

In other words, Satan tries to use his gifts to oppose God's plans, thus abusing his freedom. And since he has not yet been definitively cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the Beast and the False Prophet will also be and "will be tormented

day and night forever and ever" (Rev 20:10), he can continue to tempt men with God's permission.

It is important to emphasize the concept of the "permission of God," because even in the painful trials that constitute temptations of all kinds, God pursues another end, very different from that which Satan proposes. In today's reading, this contrast becomes evident: Satan, the accuser of the brethren (cf. Rev 12:10), seeks to show that Job honors God only out of self-interest. God, on the other hand, gives Job the opportunity to demonstrate his love for Him. And indeed, we find a Job who, after having been sorely tried, expresses in a marvelous way his surrender to God: *"The Lord gave, the Lord has taken back. Blessed be the name of the Lord."*

And this same pattern is at the bottom of all temptations: The Lord, in His wisdom, turns Satan's malicious intentions into plans of salvation. On the basis of this certainty - that, after all, temptations are meant to strengthen us - the Apostle James assures us in his letter: *"My brothers, consider it a great joy when trials of many kinds come upon you, for you well know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance, and perseverance must complete its work so that you will become fully developed, complete, not deficient in any way"* (Jas 1:2-4).

God then makes use of Satan's rebellion as He has arranged it in His plan of salvation. That is why we must never give up when trials come upon us on a personal level or when we see how the Church is being so strongly purified. The Devil tries to discourage us, so that we give up, retreat for good and stop proclaiming the Gospel.

God, on the other hand, wants to strengthen us through temptations, so that we may unite ourselves more deeply to Him, so that we believe more, so that we may remain faithful to the Church and learn to resist Satan.

In all temptations, we must always maintain our relationship with the Lord and understand that He remains with us, whether we feel it or not. We can never lose confidence! In this way, we will be strengthened and purified of that which is not essential to our journey of faith.