

October 27, 2022

## A SERIES ON SPIRITUAL LIFE

### The fight against the devil

#### (Part I)

In the meditations of the last few days, we had first spoken about that enemy who dwells within us - that is, our flesh - which, because of our fallen nature with its evil inclinations, wants to turn us away from the way of the Lord, or at least make things difficult for us. Then we also discussed the second enemy of our soul - the world - which likewise wishes to lead us away from the spiritual path by its seductions and allurements. Now we must consider one more enemy.

It is the devil, who is always ready to attack us and wants to use the other two enemies as camouflage: our fallen nature and the attraction of the world. Therefore, without paying too much attention to him or allowing ourselves to be impressed by him, we should see a little of how this fallen angel works. The important thing for us is to know that the Lord came to destroy the works of the Devil (1Jn 3:8) and that in the desert He rejected his temptations for our sake. Therefore, let us first meditate on these three temptations of Jesus in the desert, because His way of rejecting them will always be our point of reference for knowing how to resist the insidiousness of the enemy.

Let us remember that in Paradise man was tempted by the devil, who wanted to rob him of his state of grace and involve him in the rebellion of the fallen angels against God (cf. Gen 3:1-7).

When the Son of God came into the world, the Tempter approached Him to make Him fall (cf. Mt 4:1-11). Jesus had fasted for forty days in the desert before beginning His public ministry. This event reminds us -both for the place and for the duration- of the forty years in which the Israelites crossed the desert before entering the Promised Land. When Jesus was concluding His fast and was beginning to feel hungry, the Tempter approached Him to propose that He put an end to the fast by means of a miracle. At the same time, he wanted to seduce Jesus to give him proof of His divine sonship: *"If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become loaves of bread."*

Here the boldness of the Devil comes to light. He makes a demand on Jesus, as if he had a right to claim proof. He presents himself disguised in a mask of piety, wanting Jesus, out of weakness and hunger after the long fast, to yield to His physical needs. And in the same temptation he challenges Him to give a proof of His divine filiation. It is, then, a subtle temptation to make Him fall into a sin of pride. In a similar way the Lord will be tempted on the Cross, where they will cry out to Him that, if He is the Son of God, He should come down from the cross (cf. Mt 27:40).

But Jesus does not yield to temptation! He does not break His fast, nor does He perform a miracle to prove to the Devil His divine filiation. On the contrary, He teaches Him a lesson: *"Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God"*. With these words, Jesus refers back to God and reminds the Devil what true life is and what the relationship of man before God really is. We live by Him, by each of His Words! Thus, any trace of boastfulness and pride on the part of creatures loses its ground.

In the second temptation, which is all the more absurd in relation to Jesus, the devil's intention is made even clearer: *"If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'"* Again the Devil tries to hide his intention, and this time he does so by quoting a word of Scripture. But the Lord's answer is clear: *"Scripture also says: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"*

Miracles have a different purpose! They are not to be used for everyone 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 those He has sent. But it is not the sent ones who can use them on their own initiative, to accredit themselves before others. The temptation here lies in wanting to manipulate God's action, instead of leaving it to Him, in His divine free power, to perform the miracles in due time. Thus, miracles are placed in an almost magical context, in order to increase the power of the person.

In the third temptation, the Devil's true intention comes out clearly: *"Next, taking Him to a very high mountain, the devil showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. And he said to Him, 'I will give you all these, if you fall at my feet and worship"*

*me.* "This is what the Devil wants! Now he no longer hides his intentions under a mask of piety. He wants to be worshipped, and in return he offers the Kingdoms over which he has influence! On this occasion, Jesus no longer quotes a passage of Scripture to unmask the Devil's purposes and confront them with the Will of God. This time He commands him to go away: *"Jesus said to him, 'Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'* Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him." With Jesus' help, we will be able to identify and reject the Devil's temptations in our lives, even when he presents himself to us disguised as an "angel of light" (cf. 2Co 11:14). After all, his intentions are always the same, even if he uses different methods. The underlying goal behind all his temptations is that he wants to take God's rightful place. To do this, he seeks man's weak points, seducing him in his carnality, in his vanity or in his desire for power.

But we know that Jesus rejected all these temptations, and so the Devil was forced to leave Him for a while! This gives us courage to face the temptations that come, not only considering them as suffering to be endured, but knowing that, by resisting, we will emerge stronger in the fight against evil. Let us ask God to purify us deeply, so that we will not be so easily seduced and that we will notice in our spirit when the Devil is trying to lead us away from the path of God, so that we will then be able to resist in the Name of Jesus. Let us remember to always be vigilant. As long as we live in this world, we will have to fight against temptations. Only in eternity will we have been delivered from them forever.