



26. February 2023

LENTEN ITINERARY

Day 5: "Rejecting the devil"

Among the various adversities and attacks that we face on our journey, it is fitting that, on this holy itinerary, we should specifically take into consideration the lurking of the devil. Today's Gospel describes them in the temptations of Jesus in the desert (Mt 4:1-11).

He proceeds systematically in seducing man. He uses his God-given intelligence to deceive man and make him dependent on him.

It must always be borne in mind that the devil is and will always remain evil, and consequently the goals he pursues are evil. The condition of the fallen angel is different from that of the human person, who has an inclination to evil and, consequently, can act evil; but, as long as his earthly life lasts, he still has the possibility of changing his course. The Devil is unwilling and unable to do so, and remains trapped in his delusion of being able to put himself in the place of God.

We may deeply regret that an angel, who was originally so exalted, has perverted into his opposite and wants to offend God and destroy men. However, any kind of sympathy for him is inappropriate, just as it is inappropriate to blaspheme him. In the Epistle of Jude it is clearly stated: *"Not even the archangel Michael, when he was engaged in argument with the devil about the corpse of Moses, dared to denounce him in the language of abuse; all he said was, 'May the Lord rebuke you'"* (Jd 1:9). This is the way in which we too are to confront the fallen angel, never blaspheming the preternatural powers, as the Apostle Jude points out that certain false teachers did (v. 8.10).

In the temptations in the wilderness, the Lord shows us how to fend off the devil's attacks. First of all, it is important to understand that Jesus Himself repelled these attacks for us and that therefore the devil's power has already been broken. So, if we act as people of faith, we are confronted with a power that has already been defeated. It is always a matter of rejecting it in the name of Jesus and placing ourselves under the protection of our Heavenly Father. Even the invocation of Mary's name is unbearable for the fallen angel.

So let us take note that Jesus has already rejected the temptations of the Evil One for us, and therefore we are able to do the same in His Name.

Let us now look at the character of these temptations:

In the first instance, the Tempter wanted to dissuade Jesus from fasting and persuade Him to turn stones into loaves of bread by means of a seemingly pious sign. No doubt there were many other evil intentions in the background, but what is important for us is that it was an attempt to make Him yield to the inclinations of human nature. Jesus was hungry! Yet His response was clear: "*Human beings live not on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God*" (Mt 4:4). Even more important than the earthly dimension of our life is the spiritual one. From it, we must regulate our natural needs and inclinations.

The second temptation is to seduce Him into performing a miracle of spectacle, a miracle that has no inner meaning. True miracles, by manifesting the goodness and Omnipotence of God, serve men and lead them to praise and thank the Lord.

Jesus' answer is revealing: "*Do not put the Lord your God to the test*" (v. 7). This means that we must not take advantage of God for our own interests or those of others, much less with signs and miracles.

In the third temptation, finally, the evil intentions and the aim of the fallen angel become clear: he wants to be worshipped, to put himself in the place of God... To this end, he offers the kingdoms over which he has dominion.

Unfortunately, this last temptation often befalls the "mighty of this world", even if they do not perform any visible act of worship towards the devil. Only those can be saved from this temptation who adhere to Jesus' answer: "*The Lord your God is the one to whom you must do homage, him alone you must serve*" (v. 10).

In the fight against the devil, let us always keep in mind that he has already been defeated by Jesus and that his temptations have been rejected. That is why we should not be afraid, but remain vigilant.

Temptations can even come to us disguised in a pious mask, flattering us, making false promises, etc.

We must reject them simply and forcefully, without insults or profanity, lest we adopt the behaviour of the devil himself. Victory is certain! If we fight in the right way, we glorify God, we are strengthened in our way, we serve the Church in its mission and, at the same time, we cooperate in weakening the power of the devil.