

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT
Year C: Dt 26:4-10; Ps 91; Rom 10:8-13; Lk 4:1-13
March 6, 2020
Fr. David Pignato

Every year, on the First Sunday of Lent, we hear in the Gospel the account of the temptations of Jesus in the desert. It was before He began His public ministry of preaching the Gospel message of conversion and salvation. Before He began to preach of the need for all of us to resist the devil, He Himself encountered the devil and resisted his temptations. The devil foolishly, stupidly thought that he could convince Christ to betray God. But Christ did not even flinch; He did not hesitate for a moment in resisting the devil's temptations. Christ knew that the devil is "*a liar and the father of lies*" (Jn 8:44). And, most importantly, Christ knew that it is *never* justified, not even for a good reason or intention, to disobey God and His commandments.

As we begin this season of Lent, it's good for us to focus on the second temptation of Christ, according to the account of St. Luke, that we just heard in the Gospel. It was an appeal to the fallen desire for power and glory. The devil, who, we should remember, is a fallen angel, who used his freedom to rebel against God, showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and said to Him, "*I shall give to you all this power and glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I may give it to whomever I wish. All this will be yours, if you worship me.*"

The devil foolishly thought that Christ was like the rest of us, who because of our fallen nature, are tempted at times to seek power and fame. At times, we are tempted to forfeit our relationship with God in order to gain something else that seems good and attractive to us, or for some temporary gain. So, the Scriptures challenge us to reflect and ask ourselves: What is it that most tempts us to forget about our relationship with God? What is it that seems more desirable to us at times than being faithful to God? What is it that makes us think we don't really need to be faithful to God, or that we can postpone being faithful to Him?

The devil thought that Jesus would betray God for the chance to receive earthly fame and the power to rule over others. There was no chance that Jesus would ever worship the devil, even to gain power. But, what about us? Do we desire to control others, or situations, or our future, more than we desire to be faithful to God? In His response to the devil, Jesus taught us the priority of allegiance and obedience to God – that nothing should ever come before God in our lives. He said to the devil, "*It is written: You shall worship the Lord, your God, and him alone shall you serve.*" He was quoting the First Commandment, which is the foundation and bedrock principle of our relationship with God. Our

deepest identity is that of being a child of God. Before any other relationships in our lives, we belong to God; and so, the first and most important truth about how we should live is the commandment that we not worship *anyone* or *anything* other than God. If we do, we risk forfeiting our relationship with God and His offer of eternal life. Later, in His preaching, Christ would say, “*What profit is there for one to gain the whole world yet lose or forfeit himself?*” (Mt 16:26).

Anyone who is honest about temptations knows that they are not pleasant. And those who are serious about growing in holiness know that they are an unfortunate reality of our lives. Spiritual battle is part of the reality of life for a Christian. As St. Paul said, “*For our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with the world rulers of this present darkness, with the evil spirits in the heavens*” (Eph 6:12). So, when temptations come, we need to be alert and honest about them, and recognize them for what they are.

First of all, they are *not* from God. As St. James wrote, “*No one experiencing temptation should say, ‘I am being tempted by God’; for God is not subject to temptation to evil, and he himself tempts no one. Rather, each person is tempted when lured and enticed by his desire*” (Jas 1:13-14). So, God does not cause temptations, but He does allow them. Secondly, we need to remember that with every temptation comes a grace and assistance from God to resist it. “*God is faithful,*” St. Paul says, “*and will not let you be tried beyond your strength; but with the trial he will also provide a way out, so that you may be able to bear it*” (1Cor 10:13). This revealed truth means that every temptation is an opportunity to move and grow closer to God, by cooperating with the graces He offers to resist the temptation. The important thing is to turn to God for help at that moment and use our freedom to cooperate with His help. Some good words to keep in mind at a moment of temptation are from the Psalm we sang: “*Be with me, Lord, when I am in trouble*” (Ps 91).

Another thing to do when temptations come is to call to mind what God has done for us already, trusting that He will not leave us without help. In the first reading, we heard Moses remind the people, “*When the Egyptians maltreated and oppressed us, imposing hard labor upon us, we cried to the Lord, the God of our fathers, and he heard our cry and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. He brought us out of Egypt with his strong hand and outstretched arm, with terrifying power, with signs and wonders; and bringing us into this country, he gave us this land flowing with milk and honey.*” Just as God delivered the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt, so has Christ delivered us from slavery to sin. And one real consequence of this is His promise to provide grace at every moment of temptation.