

## 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Lent Yr C: Temptations of Jesus by the Devil

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Our Gospel today from St. Luke on this first Sunday of Lent picks up after Jesus's baptism in the Jordan River by St. John the Baptist.

From the Jordan River Jesus went west into the desert, actually to a mountainous region.

On my two trips to the Holy Land I recall looking west from the Jordan River out to the "Mount of Temptation," as it is called, where Jesus spent 40 days praying and fasting - no food or drink - in preparation for His 3 ½ year public ministry.

After 40 days without eating or drinking, Jesus – who was truly man - was hungry, thirsty, and very weak, as any of us would be.

It was then that the Devil tried to tempt Jesus.

I say "tried" to tempt Jesus, because, in reality, the devil was not able to tempt Jesus as he tempts us.

We are fallen human creatures, with weak minds and wills, and temptations often prove difficult for us; and sometimes we get into them.

Not so with Jesus. He was both God and man, divine and human, in one divine Person.

As perfect God and perfect man, Jesus never would have been inclined to give into the temptations that the devil placed before Him.

Knowing that Jesus was hungry, he said to Jesus, "If you are the son of God, command of this stone to become bread."

Was Jesus inclined in any way to give into this temptation? Of course not. At any time during the 40 days Jesus could have turned stone into bread, or commanded Angels bring him food to satisfy his hunger.

Why then did the devil tempt Jesus in this way? Well, he did not know that Jesus was the Son of God made man - that's why the devil said, "***If*** you are the Son of God, turn this stone into bread."

The divinity of Jesus is not something that the devil could see. If Christ's divinity could be seen, then the Jews never would have called for His death by crucifixion.

The devil knew Jesus was a very holy man, but that's about all he could surmise from his observations.

But Jesus, in His response to the devil, gives an indication that He is truly the Son of God in the flesh, when he says, "*Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.*"

Actually, Saint Luke for some reason leaves out the second part of Jesus' response, but St. Matthew in his Gospel includes the phrase, "every word that comes forth from the mouth of God."

Jesus IS the Word made flesh, who (as we profess in the Creed) was eternally begotten by the Father – or metaphorically, eternally proceeds from the mouth of the Father.

So, in His response Jesus was indicating to the devil that He truly IS God the Son.

The devil then showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world with all their power and glory, and said to him, "All these will be yours, if you fall down and worship me."

The devil is highly intelligent; if he knew Jesus was God, he never would have dared to tempt Him in this way – promising to give Jesus all the kingdoms of the world if he would "fall down and worship me," the Devil.

What does Jesus say in reply? "*You shall worship the Lord your God, and him alone shall you serve.*"

Once again Jesus responds in a way that reveals that He is God; in fact, with these words He's really telling the devil, "You should be worshiping Me, and serving Me."

But the devil, filled with sinful pride, is blind to this truth.

I'll add something else here: sin makes you stupid. And the devil, from the beginning, rebelled against God b/c he was filled with pride/arrogance.

Then the devil leads Jesus to Jerusalem, and Jesus stands on the parapet of the Temple.

What is a "parapet"? A low protective wall or railing, along the edge of a raised structure such as a roof, or at the top of a building.

The devil says to Jesus: "**If** you are the son of God, throw yourself down from here; for it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you to guard you," and "with their hands they will support you lest you dash your foot against a stone."

Here the devil was quoting Scripture - verses from Psalm 91, which is our Psalm today. Yes, the devil knows Scripture and he can quote it for his own insidious purposes.

In other words, "if you are the son of God, prove it to me. Throw yourself off the temple."

How does Jesus respond? "*You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.*"

Once again, Jesus, with these words, is revealing to the devil that He truly is God, and that the devil should not be trying to tempt Him."

And once again, the devil's great pride and arrogance renders him unable to understand this - and give Jesus the worship and adoration that He deserves.

So what can we take away from this encounter between Jesus and the devil? The Church always reads this account on the first Sunday Lent.

Here are a few things we can learn:

First: the devil is real, not some fantasy that someone made up.

Second, the devil tempts us. And he is quite bold; he even tried to tempt Jesus.

Third, the devil knows our weaknesses, our past sins and failings. And like a good tactician, he will strike at our weakest points. He wants us to fall into sin; this is all part of his ongoing rebellion against God.

Fourth, prayer and fasting helps us to resist the temptations of the evil one. Lent is a time to undertake a deeper prayer life, and to undertake fasting, acts of mortification and self-denial. These strengthen our will - because if we can say no and deny ourselves lawful things, like food and drink, entertainment, etc. this will fortify our wills to be better able to resist temptations to unlawful things, to sin.

In this Holy Season of Lent, let us call upon Our Lady. The Saints tell us that Mary ate and drank only enough to keep herself alive, constantly fasting and denying herself pleasures of food, drink, and the comforts of life.

Let us ask her, the Mother of Jesus, and our spiritual Mother in the order of grace, to form us more and more into the likeness of her Son during this holy season, in order that we may be conformed to Jesus and look forward to joy to Christ's glorious resurrection.