

Jesus fasted and was tempted by the devil.

Gospel Reading: *Matthew 4:1-11* Sunday (March 1)

1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 And he fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was hungry. 3 And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." 4 But he answered, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'" 5 Then the devil took him to the holy city, and set him on the pinnacle of the temple, 6 and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will give his angels charge of you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'" 7 Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'" 8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; 9 and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." 10 Then Jesus said to him, "Begone, Satan! for it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'" 11 Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and ministered to him.

Meditation: Are you ready to follow the Lord Jesus and to go with him wherever he leads you? Jesus did not choose his own course or path in life, but followed the will of his Father in heaven. After Jesus' was baptized by John the Baptist at the River Jordan, he was led by the Spirit of God to withdraw into the wilderness of Judea - a vast desert wilderness that was mostly uninhabitable and full of danger. Danger from scorching heat by day and extreme cold at night, danger from wild animals and scorpions, plus the deprivation of food and scarcity of water.

Preparing mind, heart, and will to serve God

Why did Jesus choose such a barren, lonely place for a sustained period of prayer and fasting? Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell us in their Gospel accounts that Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness. Mark states it most emphatically: "The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness" (Mark 1:12). What compelled Jesus to seek solitude, away from his family and friends, for such a lengthy period? Was it simply a test to prepare him for his mission? Or did Satan want to lure him into a trap? The word *tempt* in English usually means to entice someone to do what is wrong or forbidden. The scriptural word used here also means *test* in the sense of proving and assessing someone to see if they are prepared and ready for the task at hand. We test flight pilots to see if they are fit to fly under all conditions, including times of adverse turbulence, storms, and poor visibility. In like manner God tests his people to see if they are ready to follow and serve him without reservation or compromise.

Keeping God's word and holding to his promises

On a number of occasions God tested Abraham to prove his faith and to strengthen his hope in the promises that God made to him. Abraham obeyed willingly even when God asked him to sacrifice his only son Isaac, the son of promise. When the Israelites were sorely tested in Egypt for more than 400 years of hard labour and persecution, they did not forget God. They kept God's word and remembered his promise to deliver them from oppression and bring them back into their promised homeland.

When God called Moses to free the Israelites from their captivity in Egypt, God led them into the wilderness to his holy mountain at Sinai. There Moses ascended the mountain and met with God face to face for 40 days in prayer and fasting (Exodus 24:18). The prophet Elijah was also led on a 40 day journey to the holy mountain at Sinai (also called Horeb) to seek the face of God. God sustained Elijah for his journey with supernatural bread from heaven (1 Kings 19:8).

Jesus' forty days of testing and preparation

Jesus was no exception to this pattern of testing and preparation for the mission his Father gave him. He was led into the wilderness for 40 days without food and little shelter. He had nothing to sustain himself in this barren wilderness except what the Father would provide for him during his forty days of prayer and

fasting. Jesus was left alone in this harsh and austere environment to wrestle with the temptation to seek an easy or comfortable course that would avoid pain and hardship, humiliation and rejection, suffering and death on a cross.

Jesus resisted the devil and obeyed the voice of his Father

Jesus now freely enters the wilderness in order to regain Paradise for the lost children of God. Jesus refuses food to show his dependence on the bread of heaven, the word of God, that would sustain him not only in his physical hunger, but in his hour of temptation as well. When Satan tempted Jesus to turn stones into bread, Jesus replied with the words of Scripture, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (quote from Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:4).

Strength from God in resisting temptation

Jesus was tempted like us and he overcame sin not by his own human effort but by the grace and strength which his Father gave to him. He had to renounce his will for the will of his Father. He succeeded because he wanted to please his Father and he trusted that his Father would give him the strength to overcome the obstacles that stood in the way. Luke says that Jesus was "full of the Holy Spirit" (Luke 4:1). When tempted by the devil Jesus did not try to fight his adversary on his own human strength. He relied on the power which the Spirit gave him.

A Daily Quote for Lent: *On the Snare of the Devil*, by Ambrose, 339-397 A.D.

"The devil said to Jesus: 'If you are the son of God, command that these stones become bread' (Luke 4:3). Here we learn that there are three principal weapons that the devil likes to carry in order to wound our souls. They are gluttony, arrogance and ambition. Here begins the weapon with which he has already been victorious. We likewise should begin to be victorious in Christ in the very same area in which we have been defeated in Adam - we should be wary of gluttony. The devious trap is set for us when the table is laid for a royal banquet - it is bound to weaken our defences.

"See what weapons Christ uses to defeat the power of the devil. He does not use the almighty power he has as God - what help would that be to us? In his humanity he summons the help common to all - overlooking bodily hunger and seeking the word of God for nourishment.

"Whoever follows the Word is no longer attached to earthly bread, because he receives the bread of heaven and knows the divine is better than the human, the spiritual is better than the physical. Therefore, because such a person desires the true life, he looks for that which fortifies the heart by means of its invisible substance." (excerpt from *On the Gospel of St. Luke, 4, 17*)

OPENING PRAYER "Lord Jesus, your word is life and joy for me. Fill me with your Holy Spirit that I may have the strength and courage to embrace your will in all things and to renounce whatever is contrary to it." **Amen.**

CLOSING PRAYER:- **World Peace, .**

Lord, we pray for the power to be gentle; the strength to be forgiving; the patience to be understanding; and the endurance to accept the consequences of holding to what we believe to be right. Help us to devote our whole life and thought and energy to the task of making peace, praying always for the inspiration and the power to fulfill the destiny for which we and all men were created. **Amen.**