

First Sunday of Lent C - Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen
March 06, 2022.

This Sunday's Gospel reading, Luke (4:1-13), also in Matthew 4:1-11 and in Mark 1:12-13, records Jesus being tempted by Satan in the desert wilderness. While Jesus was tempted at other times throughout His lifetime on earth, this period of time emphasized how Jesus responded to temptation, both as an example to others as well as to reveal His ability to wrestle with temptation and to overcome it. Both Luke and Matthew record the first temptation as one involving food. **After fasting for 40 days, Jesus was clearly hungry. Satan chose to tempt Jesus by telling Him to turn stones into bread. Jesus responded by quoting from Deuteronomy, "It is written, One does not live on bread alone."** (Luke 4:4). In the second temptation, the devil took Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. **And the devil said to Him, "All this authority I will give You... Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours."** And Jesus answered and said to him, **"Get behind Me, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.'** (Luke 4:5-8). Then Satan brought Him to Jerusalem, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, **"If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here. For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you,' and, 'In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.'"** And Jesus answered and said to him, **"It has been said, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'"** Now when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time."(Luke 4:9-13)

Many observations can be made about the meaning and purpose of Jesus' temptations in these passages. First, Jesus revealed **His full humanity**. He was hungry and wrestled with temptation. He expressed feelings, thoughts, and words as humans typically do in tense situations. Second, Jesus revealed **His deity**. His ability to resist temptation was clearly displayed as superior to other humans. He had strong knowledge of God's Word and even had the power to tell Satan to "Be gone." Jesus was tempted, yet remained sinless, proving Himself divine. Third, **Jesus offered an example of dealing with temptation. During His struggles, He quoted God's Word, recognized the enemy's tricks, and emphasized worshiping God.** These temptations reveal important truth concerning how **we can respond to temptations today, relying upon God and His Word in order to stand firm against the attacks of Satan.**

In the Gospel reading, Luke also reminds us that Satan, our Enemy also quotes Scripture, many times cleverly, to silence the Spirit — the Bible is used as a weapon against the children of Light in today's world. This is the most seductive power of the Enemy. We must always be alert to the misuse of the Word, to the exploitation of the good news for the purpose of hurting the least of our brothers and sisters. Jesus uses Scripture as he responds with clarity, **"You shall not tempt the Lord your God"**. Throughout history, human beings have tried to bargain with their Creator, to test the one who has given them life. We see it in all mythologies and even between the ancient Hebrews and their God. Jesus rejects such bargaining even when it uses the words of Scripture. What did the disciples learned from this remarkable story? After the Ascension, we hear Peter's use of Scripture repeatedly when he teaches, interprets, and preaches the Good News of Christ.

We live in a world full of temptations. Most of them coming not as apples hanging from a tree but rather subtle messages that seek to undermine our identity and invite us to forget whose we are. So many commercials suggest we are inadequate. So many headlines suggest that there is not enough to go around. And so many politicians – of all parties – contend that we have a great deal to fear. In the face of these identity-obscuring messages, we forget, as Christians that we all root ourselves in the baptismal promise that safe-guarded and empowered Jesus. This is the baptismal promise that reminds us that we are so totally enough in God's eyes, that there is plenty

to go around, and that we need not live in fear. Evil tempts us to go back on everything, to abandon who we are, to betray all that we love, usually to gain something or save ourselves. We are even sometimes willing to sell our souls for “good” reasons — especially in extreme situations, like not having eaten for forty days, or living in divided times.

As in quantum physics, temptation begins with small things. Because they are so small, these little temptations can be hard to identify and easy to excuse. Every day we are invited to rebel against God in little things and big things. The patterns of behaviour around us, our own self-centred tendencies, and the invitation of the devil to trust more in our own flawed judgment than in God's wisdom. But temptation is not sin. In fact, every temptation is a chance to exercise our trust in God, to reclaim territory for Christ's Kingdom, just as Jesus did when he was tempted. Because Jesus was tempted, he redeemed temptation. With his grace, his victory over sin can become our victory. The message Christ has for us today is a message of hope. Temptation begins with the excusable and seemingly insignificant, but as in Romans 5:12-19, St. Paul writes, **“Sin came into world through one man, death through sin, so death spread to all who sinned.”**

Sin is, at heart, rebellion against God. Since God created us to live in communion with him, in whom we find happiness, sin always involves seeking happiness in some other place than in communion with God. There are three of these places, three idols we worship which correspond to Jesus' three temptations. JRR Tolkien, in his classic Trilogy, *“The Lord of the Rings”*, paints a vivid portrait of what happens to worshippers of these idols. The first idol is **pleasure**. This is the first temptation: **“command this stone to become bread”**. The world's comforts and pleasures are good, God made them. But they can't satisfy the heart. When we turn them into life's goal, we become like Gollum, Tolkien's slimy, murderous villain who only cares about satisfying his fleshly desires. The second idol is **power**: **“I shall give to you all this power and glory.”** When this becomes our idol, we follow in Saruman's footsteps. Saruman was a good wizard who at first desired the ring of power so he could govern the world better. But that thirst for power enslaved him. It enslaves us too if we look for happiness in having control over things and people. The third idol is **popularity**. This corresponds to the temptation **to impress the crowds by jumping off the Temple**. When we worship this idol, we become like Shelob, the gigantic spider who spins webs to trap and devour others. Our thirst for popularity turns us into monsters, spinning webs of intrigue and lies, destroying other people to climb the social ladder. **We all have these three tendencies, which are at the root of our sins. But for each of us, one tendency is strongest. That is the “root” sin; it's behind most of our selfish, sinful actions.** We may think that sin was taking just one bite of the forbidden fruit, just one bite, what could be the harm. Small concessions and compromises ripple outward, leading to a world of hurt.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, getting to know our root sin and its most frequent manifestations arms us for spiritual battle. The better we know where we are weak, the better we will be able to resist temptation. We can conquer sin, in our lives and in the world around us. We just need to stay united to Christ who understands our weaknesses when we are faced with temptations and gives us hope and encouragement. That's what the Eucharist is for - that's why God gave it to us. And that's also what the Bible is for. Jesus parries the Devil's attacks by quoting from the Scriptures, the inspired Word of God. Today, let's renew our confidence in Christ and our determination to fight for the advance of his Kingdom, to cut back our root sin and make more room for his grace to grow in our lives. **Let's promise to do our part to stay united to him, to trust in him and seek our happiness in friendship with him, and let's ask him which tactic he wants us to use this Lent: whether to spend more time with him in the Eucharist, or more time with him in the Scriptures, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen!**