

**GOSPEL***Luke 4:1-13*

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit through the wilderness, being tempted there by the devil for forty days. During that time he ate nothing and at the end he was hungry. Then the devil said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to turn into a loaf.' But Jesus replied, 'Scripture says: Man does not live on bread alone.'

Then leading him to a height, the devil showed him in a moment of time all the kingdoms of the world and said to him, 'I will give you all this power and the glory of these kingdoms, for it has been committed to me and I give it to anyone I choose. Worship me, then, and it shall all be yours.' But Jesus answered him, 'Scripture says: You must worship the Lord your God, and serve him alone.'

Then he led him to Jerusalem and made him stand on the parapet of the Temple. 'If you are the Son of God,' he said to him 'throw yourself down from here, for scripture says: He will put his angels in charge of you to guard you, and again: They will hold you up on their hands in case you hurt your foot against a stone.' But Jesus answered him, 'It has been said: You must not put the Lord your God to the test.'

Having exhausted all these ways of tempting him, the devil left him, to return at the appointed time.

**HOMILY OF ST PAUL VI***7 March 1965 (Excerpt, Translated)*

This is a great, arcane page of the Gospel. After thirty years of hidden and industrious life in Nazareth, Jesus is about to begin his preaching; but first he goes to the south of Judea, to the Jordan, where he wants to receive the Baptism of penance from the Precursor, John the Baptist. Then he climbs the surrounding mountains which constitute a landscape devoid of vegetation, horrid, lifeless (the Holy Father considered it at length during his journey to Palestine) and, in a solitude which is certainly not restful, but rather of fearful silence, Jesus fasts for forty days and forty nights.

And here appears a spiritual character, but fearful and evil: it is the devil; and he dares to tempt the Savior.

We will not dwell on the three individual proposals made by the evil one; it will be enough to consider the simple picture that depicts the clash between the spirit of evil and the Son of God made Man. The Gospel presents us precisely with this drama, this duel between Jesus and Satan. Jesus is tempted. He too, that is, wants to know the battle between the soul that intends to remain faithful to God and the invader who deceives it to distract it and lead it to evil. Here it must be remembered that what refers to Jesus also concerns us. The life of Jesus is configured to ours: what happens to Him is reflected in us.

Was Jesus tempted? All the more can and must we be. The question seems logical, indeed, since we live in a world that is completely threatened and disturbed by this hidden enmity of those whom Saint Paul calls "the rulers of this darkness". We are surrounded by something fatal, bad, perverse, which excites our passions, takes advantage of our weaknesses, insinuates itself into our habits, follows our steps and suggests evil to us. Temptation is, therefore, the encounter between a good conscience and the attraction of evil; and in the most insidious form of all. Evil does not present itself to us with its real face, which is horrific and frightening. The exact opposite happens. Temptation is the simulation of good; it is the deception by which evil takes on the mask of good; it is the confusion between good and evil. This misunderstanding, which can continually be before us, tends to make us believe that good exists where, on the contrary, evil exists.

And here we enter no longer into the evangelical scene, but into our life and experience, into the world in which we find ourselves. It is of all moments and hours; it is of every kind, this confusion. It is peculiar, one might say, to modern man, who has lost the right criterion of good and evil. He has lost the sense of sin, as the masters of spiritual life explain.

Modern man adapts to everything; he is capable of becoming the advocate of bad things in order to support the freedom of his own pleasure, and that everything can and must manifest itself, without any preclusion against evil; an indiscriminate freedom

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for what is illicit. Thus, one ends up authorizing all the expressions of the lower life; instinct takes the upper hand over reason, interest over duty, personal advantage over common welfare. Selfishness therefore becomes sovereign in the life of the individual and of society. Why? Because one has forgotten, and no longer has the sense to distinguish: this is good, this is bad. One no longer knows the absolute norm for such a distinction, that is, the law of God. He who no longer takes into account the law of the Lord, his Commandments and Precepts and no longer feels them reflected in his own conscience, lives in great confusion and becomes an enemy of himself. It is undeniable, in fact, that many, many of our ills are brought about by our own hands, by our foolish wickedness, obstinate in seeking not what is beneficial, but what is harmful to existence.

We must therefore renew and strengthen our ability to judge, to discern good from evil. Consequently, when evil - that is, everything that is forbidden, contrary to the law of God, to good morals and to the sound judgment of reason - appears attractive, flattering, seductive, useful, easy, pleasant, we must demonstrate energy and wisdom, so as to say firmly and resolutely: no. This is the way to reject and overcome temptation. Moreover, the end of the Gospel passage of this first Sunday of Lent gives Christian life a militant concept. Can a true Christian be weak, fearful, cowardly, a traitor to his own name, his own conscience, his own duty? Not at all. The authentic Christian is strong,

courageous, loyal, consistent, heroic, if necessary: the Christian - we know this from our Confirmation - is militant, miles Christi : a soldier of Christ.

Christian life is a battle: we must be constantly alert; we must always be able to discern, distinguish good from evil, and decide: I stand for good; for virtue; for my duty; for the promises made. I will try, therefore, to be truly ready to overcome every attraction that could reduce me weak and cowardly in front of the presentation of evil disguised as good.

It is clear, then, that the great lesson of Christian life with which Lent begins demands from us two explicit and great memories. We must be wise first of all, disposed to good judgment, eager, that is, to reflect and to keep the lamp of our conscience and our thoughts always lit before us. We must not walk in the dark, but rather carrying high this splendor that God has placed in our souls and which is called our conscience. Let us not deceive ourselves, let us not extinguish the voice of conscience, let us never seek to distort its rectitude of judgment. Let us be simple and linear: "Est, est; non, non". Yes, yes; no, no. We must be truly aware of this necessary clarity of judgment and conduct.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/ Homily?



**Head:** What is most difficult about saying, "no" to evil which "appears attractive, flattering, seductive, useful, easy, pleasant"?



**Heart:** St Paul VI describes an authentic Christian as strong, courageous, loyal, consistent, heroic, and, when necessary, militant. Of all these, which do you find most difficult? Why?



**Hands:** How might we be more eager "to reflect and to keep the lamp of our conscience and our thoughts always lit before us" this week?

## PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another:

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Offer prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps praying the 'Glory Be'.