

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

When Jesus came up from the water, immediately following His baptism at the hand of His cousin John, the heavens were opened, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him like a dove and alighted upon Him. The Father spoke, saying “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” “Then,” writes St. Matthew, “Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.”

From St. Matthew’s account, it seems that the glory of the Father’s proclamation of His Son, a clear demonstration of the Divinity of God the Son, quickly gives way to His time in the wilderness, a clear demonstration of His Humanity. In St. Matthew the temptation of the Lord occurs as if He was whisked away still dripping from the Jordan waters. God the Son is publicly revealed, and then the devil strikes quickly. The devil strikes hard. The devil strikes with every sinister weapon he has, for the only weapon he has is the lie. He twists the clear Word of God.

The devil attacked the weaknesses of human nature, the very nature that the Christ had taken on when He was conceived by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary. Note well that while the Spirit leads God the Son into the wilderness, the Spirit does not tempt. Do not be mistaken. God indeed tempts no one. Temptation is the work of the devil, a dark and sinister work you too have experienced. But while Christ overcame the temptation, you have not always done so.

The Lord fasted. Perhaps you have fasted. Christians do. Scripture encourages it. Faith leads the Christian to deny bodily urges and seek true nourishment, nourishment of soul, in the Gifts of God. And while you might not have fasted for 40 days, you have undoubtedly known hunger. It begins as a biological nagging, and if unsatisfied, it grows.

If you don’t eat, or if you can’t eat, hunger becomes worse. It increases to eclipse other bodily impulses. It overtakes the body, even making thought difficult. Real hunger drives heart and mind and body to forsake everything and to pursue food. The flesh has the ability to cloud the mind. To stop eating is to die. So in one way, fasting is a little taste of death.

Where hunger is severe enough, men will break the law to get food. They will break civil law, and they will break God’s Law. They will do anything to satisfy the physical craving, the craving that soon gives way to discomfort and then to pain. But once they have eaten and are full, hunger soon returns.

This is why Christians fast. Fasting is an exercise in the will overcoming the cravings of the body. If, by periodic, safe fasting, you can teach yourself to control the urge to eat, then with God’s help you can also overcome the temptations of the flesh. Fasting is spiritual exercise. Fasting, for that reason, Tertullian wrote, is the banquet of the soul.

Hunger is the flesh expressing its needs, its weaknesses. So it is at once quite reasonable, and at the same time a great Mystery, that the Scripture says “...when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward, *Jesus* was hungry.” That a Man who denied Himself food for forty days would be hungry surprises no one. But that the God who traced out the boundaries of the seas and filled them, the God that spoke and created all living things, the God that causes the crops to

spring forth and mature, the God upon whom the eyes of all wait, who gives them their meat in due season, the God that daily feeds the whole world, that that God was hungry, is a Mystery.

For in Christ, God took on Flesh. He took on the Flesh of the Virgin, but He did so sinlessly, immaculately, by the angelic proclamation of the Word of God and by the Spirit, the overshadowing of the power of the Most High.

So although He was without sin, although He was installed as Christ by the Spirit lighting upon Him and remaining, still He is fully Man, Man like you and like me, Man who hungered and thirsted, slept and wept, bled and died. God became Flesh and dwelt among us. He who created all souls is of rational soul subsisting. So He could be tempted. And that temptation was real.

It is not that hunger is a sin. But the devil was right there to turn trial into temptation. So learn from the account of the temptation of the Christ, for the devil works in the same way to tempt you. He comes at moments of weakness. He works to turn your trials into irresistible temptation to cause you to sin.

The sinful heart is like a severe hunger. It enslaves mind and members to the task of satisfying its urges. And those urges you have known. It begins as a nagging, and it grows. If you don't satisfy it, it becomes worse. It grows to drown out other bodily impulses, drowning out even mind and conscience. And truth be told, you have not always resisted its urges. You have succumbed to temptation. It is in your flesh to do so.

The devil tempted the Christ to speak and it would be, as in the beginning God spoke and it was. The Christ had the power to do so. But He came now in humility, not in glory. So He answered the devil, rebuking him, teaching the devil that to truly eat is to hear the Word of God and believe it. By the Word of God are we truly fed in a lasting, eternal, spiritual way. The Word of God is the bounty of the soul.

When the tempter twisted God's Word and tried to trick Him, He refused the devil's trap, rebuking him by the Word of God. He refused the devil's taunt to throw Himself off the pinnacle of the Temple to prove who He is. He rebuked the devil with the right exposition, the correct meaning of the Word of God. So too when the devil tried to tempt Him with power and authority and riches, if He would only break the First Commandment. Again He rebuked the devil with the Word of God preached rightly, and the devil left Him.

But the devil would return. He would return in the blasphemous shouts, and in the blow to Christ's sinless head. The devil would return in the flailing scourge, in the chafing gibbet, and in the spikes and taunts, as every blow, every shout, brought with it temptation to do as the mockers shouted: "...save Yourself, and come down from the cross."

But He did not come down from the cross. He endured crucifixion. He endured the darkness of Golgotha. He endured the life being drained from Him. He endured His lifeless Body being pierced. He endured being wrapped in gravecloths and spices and being placed in the tomb. He endured the sealing of the tomb, and the darkness of death.

And then, on the third day, then did the Omnipotent Lord make Himself known for who He truly is. For He is, He was, and He shall ever be Almighty God.

By the empty tomb He did a miracle greater than turning stones into bread: He overcame death and left the tomb while the stone seal was yet in place. Then did He prove that God the Father and all His angels are with Him. Indeed, He proved that He is Lord of the angels, and that the angels worship Him. He proved that He is Lord over all the kingdoms of earth, and of heaven.

According to His ancient promise, God did provide for Himself the Lamb. And by His Sacrifice, your sins are forgiven. By His resurrection, you are redeemed, declared holy and pure in God's sight.

So, as the Apostle writes, you, you who believe in Christ, you who believe that what He did He did for you, you too are, especially in this violet season, "as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things." For in Christ, as a wiser preacher once preached, "...the Kingdom ours remaineth."

It is in Him, by the power of the same Holy Spirit, that you deny yourself for a time in this Lententide. And it is in Him that you truly feast, as you hear His Word and it fills your heart and mind, and as you eat His Body and drink His Blood, the Divine, Heavenly, soul-sating Feast that He provides, the Miraculous Food that He alone can give, Food which nourishes unto eternity.

You eat and drink, and your sins are forgiven. You eat and drink, and you are sustained here in the wilderness of this fallen world. You are sustained to overcome the cravings of the fallen flesh. You are sustained and strengthened to withstand temptation by the Spirit's power, to overcome the traps that the devil lays by the Word of God. In Christ you have the power to say "no" to sin. And in Christ you have the sure promise of your resurrection. Until that Day, you are sustained to trust in Christ alone, your Mighty Fortress. And the Holy Angels minister to you.

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