

The First Sunday in Lent
St. Luke 4:1-13

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

It is now the First Sunday in Lent, and, as has long been the church's custom, there is a move from hearing of the manifestations of the Divine in Christ throughout the Epiphany season to a focus on the humanity of Christ. The First Sunday in Lent, in particular, finds Jesus moving from His Baptism, at which is proclaimed to Him, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased," to the wilderness, having been led there by the Holy Spirit. And, just as He was Baptized for you, He is now going to the wilderness for you. Having been joined to you in Baptism and having had all of that sin washed onto Him, He now goes into the wilderness to be faced with temptations like (and very much unlike) humanity always faces.

The image of the scapegoat is brought to mind here. In Leviticus 16 is prescribed the manner in which the sin of the people is atoned for. Two goats are brought to the high priest; one is sacrificed and its blood sprinkled on the people and various instruments in and around the temple so as to make atonement for the people. Then the priest, "[lays] both his hands on the head of the live goat, and [confesses] over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness." (Leviticus 16:21) Likewise, Jesus, having just bathed in the sin-filthy waters of the Jordan is led by the Spirit into the wilderness.

There, in the wilderness, Jesus fasted for 40 days. The self-disciplined practice of fasting during Lent (be it the denial of some pleasurable thing, such as sweets or some entertaining activity, or a full-fledged fast) hearkens back to this 40-day fast of Jesus. The season of Lent is 40 days (not counting Sundays) also because of Jesus' 40-day fast in the wilderness when He was tempted.

Now, go without food for any length of time, and food starts looking better and better the longer you go. Regardless of the pains of hunger, food becomes a temptation to those who deny themselves food. The same goes for any kind of less-strict fast. Try spending 40 days (or 46 if you're going to count Sundays) without cake or cookies or ice cream or candy—the first day you'll be fine... probably even the second and third, too; by the fourth day, however, and certainly by the fifth day you'll have likely developed a craving for cake or cookies or ice cream or candy. Spend a little time without the internet or television, if you're used to using these things regularly, and you'll quickly find yourself missing something and wanting it back.

Now, while the consumption of cake or cookies or ice cream or candy—in moderation of course—is not sinful, the breaking of such a self-discipline is a symptom of the sinfulness that pervades all that you are and do. Similarly, proper use of the internet and television is not sinful, but to fast from these for a set period of time and then to use them in that set period of time is a symptom of the sinfulness that pervades all that you are and do. It's not a sin to break any self-imposed fast, but it proves that you do not live without sin.

Not Jesus Christ, however.

He was in the wilderness for 40 days, and St. Luke wrote, "[H]e ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry." It would normally go without saying that after eating nothing for 40 days, Jesus would be hungry, but the point Luke was making is that Jesus fasted fully in His human nature, and that after 40 days, He, like any person would be, was deliriously hungry. So, what did Satan, that Great Tempter do? "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." "Go ahead, Jesus. You're the Son of God... You are God. You have the power to do anything. I dare you to turn this stone into bread."

Now, recall that was merely 40 days ago that the voice of God from heaven told Jesus, "You are my beloved Son." But, the human mind without food for 40 days works in extra-mysterious ways.

However, the human mind without food for 40 days and without sin still knows what to do: "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.'"

The passage from Deuteronomy 8 continues, "but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD." (Deuteronomy 8:3) Life is not found only in the bread that you eat; that is, the bread you make for yourselves to eat. That bread is eaten for a time, and you still die. However, life is found in the One Who is the Bread of Life, for He is the very Word of God that proceeds from His mouth, in the flesh made manifest.

No, Jesus did not command the stone to be turned into bread. The Word doesn't work that way. To do that, the Word would destroy the stone. The Word creates, and what He creates He does not destroy...at least, not before the end.

Now, you might imagine that Satan was a little dejected here. So, the Great Deceiver tried another angle. "And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said to him, 'To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.'" Did you catch that little deception? "I can give all of this to you, *because it has been delivered to me*. Go ahead, I dare you." Satan would not have this power had it not been given to him, and as it is declared in Scripture, specifically in Job and Revelation, this power is given to him by God. So, He tries to tempt the One who gave him this power and authority by giving Him this power and authority back.

Now, any man after the fall would jump at the chance to reign in all power and authority for Himself. Things would finally get done and be done correctly, at least in the way that he or she sees it. With one flick of the wrist, they could bring an end to world hunger, cause all wars to cease, heal all diseases...bring about a utopia as they see utopia. And all of this for one simple act of worship? "Hey, I can get by with it this one time; after all, I'll have the power and authority to correct it afterwards," one could easily think. "If it could all be done so simply, what need is there of Jesus and the cross? What need is there of God? I can do it all myself, and the only cost is one simple bow of the knee to Satan."

And, there-in is the point. If Satan could have gotten Jesus to worship Him, then he would have saved his own hide. If Jesus accepted Satan's offer of power and authority for one simple act of worship, then He wouldn't have to have gone to the cross where He would ultimately crush and defeat Satan. In the process, He who bows the knee to Satan denies God Who created him (or, in Jesus' case, begot Him) and orders all things for his good, creating an attitude of thanklessness: "Who needs God?"

Not Jesus Christ, however. His response? "It is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.'" The sinless response to this temptation to spite and replace God with the self is taken from Deuteronomy 6 and 1 Samuel 7. Being mindful of God Who created you and orders all things for your good (and redeemed you) is to thank Him, worship Him only, and serve Him only.

Further dejected, Satan then turned the tables on Jesus. To this point, Jesus had responded to Satan's temptation with the Word of God; so, Satan responded in kind.

And he took him to Jerusalem and 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 will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'"

This is the oldest trick in Satan's book. He will take the Word of God and twist it to suit his purposes. He did this with Eve in the Garden when He asked, "Did God really say...?" He did it here with Jesus, "If you are the Son of God..." "Go ahead, I dare you; throw yourself down from here and see if God's angels will catch you."

God tells you to trust Him in His Word. Satan twists that Word and tells you to make Him prove it. "Did God really say you would die if you ate of the fruit? Make Him prove it; take some and eat—you

won't die." "Did God really say that Baptism saves you? Make Him prove it; you've sinned since." "Did God really say the bread is His Body? Did God really say the wine is His Blood? Make Him prove it; it doesn't taste like flesh and blood, does it?"

Satan lays some pretty clever snares, doesn't He?

- Adam and Eve did eat some of the fruit that they were forbidden to eat, and wouldn't you know it, they didn't die right on the spot. Their immediate thought might have been that God had lied to them.
- And, you certainly have and continue to sin long after your Baptisms; and sin, as you are taught, is what separates you from God—what separates you from salvation. In the history of the church, many would delay Baptism until they were near death because they didn't want their post-Baptismal sins to deny them salvation—they had succumbed to the doubt that Satan had cast about that Word of God in 1 Peter 3:21, where it is written, "Baptism...now saves you..."
- How many Christian denominations claim that the Sacrament of the Altar is merely symbolic? "When Jesus said, 'This is...,'" He meant, 'This represents...'" What a crafty liar Satan is that He would cause one to doubt Jesus' words (even put words in His mouth!) because fallen logic says that since the bread doesn't taste like flesh and the wine doesn't taste like blood, then they must be representative.

And you are quick to believe his lies because they are crafty and logical. Old Adam likes logic. It makes him feel good. It makes him feel accomplished. It makes him feel smart. It makes him feel on par with God. "Hey, maybe Satan and God agree on this point, then I can, too."

Not Jesus Christ, however. In keeping with His pattern, He responded with the Word of God: "It is said, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" The sinless response is taken from Deuteronomy 6. God's Word says it and God has given you faith to believe it; therefore, there is no need to doubt it.

- When God said, "You shall surely die," He kept that promise and condemned father Adam and mother Eve and all their seed (that's you and me) to death—a slow, painful death of toil and labor and sin. But, He also promised the way out, for from the woman will come One who will crush the head of the serpent. Ironic that the next verse in Psalm 91, which Satan quoted, says as much: "You will tread on the lion and the adder; the young lion and the serpent you will trample underfoot." (Psalm 91:13)
- When God said, "Baptism now saves you," He meant it, from that moment on. And because of that Baptism, through the work of God's Law, you see your sin, confess it, and receive forgiveness through God-given faith, given in the waters of Holy Baptism, seeing the Savior through the work of the Gospel.
- When God said, "This is...," He meant "is" "'Is' means 'is,'" Luther argued against Huldrych Zwingli, one of those "reformers" who argued that Jesus meant "represents" instead of "is." By faith, you believe the bread is the Body and the wine is the Blood, fully flesh and blood, though outwardly they taste like (and still remain) bread and wine.

Listen to Jesus' response once more. "It is said, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" Jesus said to Satan, "the Lord your God." Yes, Satan's Lord and God is the same as your Lord and God, for He is the Lord and God of all. Luther called Satan, "God's devil." That should give you some perspective. There is One who is greater than God's devil in the world. When Jesus cried out, "Τετέλεσται," from the cross, He finished the devil in one last breath, defeated him, put him under his feet, crushed his head.

"And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time." Satan left dejected and defeated. By His perfect resistance, Jesus had sealed His victory over Satan. So, the devil left him until the opportune time—the time when he placed in people's hearts that the only way they could win (at life, to get salvation, whatever you like, they are all lies used by the Great Deceiver)...the only way they could win is to get rid of Jesus by putting Him to death.

However, you know the outcome of this sacrifice on Calvary. "By His dying He has destroyed

death, and by His rising again He has restored to us everlasting life," is prayed in the proper preface for Easter. "This world's prince may still scowl fierce as he will, He can harm us none, He's judged; the deed is done," you just sang (or something like that, depending on which arrangement was sung). Satan's efforts in Jerusalem that night were for naught; God's victory over His devil was sealed at Jesus' temptation and delivered on Calvary. "Τετέλεσται!"

These days, you pray, "Lead us not into temptation." You learn that to mean that "God, indeed, tempts no one; but we pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us, so that the devil, the world, and our flesh may not deceive us, nor seduce us into misbelief, despair, and other great shame and vice; and though we be assailed by them, that still we may finally overcome and gain the victory." The good news this day is that Jesus perfectly resisted temptation for you, so that you could receive the credit for it. He was led into the wilderness like the scapegoat on your behalf, having been Baptized to be joined to you, and countered all of Satan's temptations—which were more than you could ever have borne—and given to you the gift of His perfect resistance. He perfectly resisted the shouts on Calvary tempting Him to come down from the cross and save Himself for you, so that you could receive the benefits of His work on the cross and His rising again from the grave: death destroyed for you and life eternal for you.

Thanks be to God, dear hearers in Christ. Christ has resisted the devil in all of His temptations (in the wilderness and at Calvary) and given you the victory. Therefore, you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.