

SPIRITUALITY

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Matt 4:4b

One does not live on bread alone,
but on every word that comes forth from
the mouth of God.

Gospel

Matt 4:1-11; L22A

At that time Jesus was
led by the Spirit
into the desert
to be tempted by the devil.
He fasted for forty days and
forty nights,
and afterwards he was
hungry.
The tempter
approached and
said to him,
“If you are the Son
of God,
command that these stones become
loaves of bread.”

He said in reply,
“It is written:
*One does not live on bread alone,
but on every word that comes
forth
from the mouth of God.*”

Then the devil took him to the holy city,
and made him stand on the parapet
of the temple,
and said to him, “If you are the Son
of God, throw yourself down.

For it is written:
*He will command his angels
concerning you
and with their hands they will
support you,
lest you dash your foot against a
stone.*”

Jesus answered him,
“Again it is written,
*You shall not put the Lord, your
God, to the test.*”



Reflecting on the Gospel

Temptations can be difficult to avoid! Even the Lord’s Prayer concludes with the exhortation to “lead us not into temptation.” But what is a temptation in the modern world? Sometimes, for people attempting to control their weight or lose weight, a temptation can be dessert or an especially delightful meal. For others who tend to procrastinate, a temptation can be a movie, a good book, some TV, or nearly anything else but the task at hand!

In today’s gospel we learn that Jesus himself faces temptation, and not only one but three. The early church fathers recognized that these temptations were metaphorical for (1) the needs of the body, (2) one’s relationship with the divine, and (3) one’s own desire for power and glory. In each instance, of course, Jesus overcomes the temptation. He recognizes that one does not live on bread alone, that one does not put the Lord to the test, and that power and glory are not to be had by worshipping anything other than God.

If these temptations seem beyond us, we need only look more carefully at our own lives. Bodily needs, desires, and wants can easily overtake us. We are reminded that there is much more to life than food, clothes, shelter, a car, or any other physical thing. When we become captivated by sophisticated marketing and believe we must have the next best thing, we can take comfort in knowing that we do not live by bread alone. In other words, there is more to life than creature comforts or satisfying the needs of the body.

Not many of us will be tempted to throw ourselves down from a cliff to see if God’s angels will catch us, but how many of us ask God for a sign or test God in another way? Jesus reminds us that we are not to test God. In times of stress, or prior to making a major decision, we want to know the right path and so we might place limitations or strictures on God and how God might interact with us. Such is not the way of Christ. Instead, we must live our lives without putting God to the test.

Finally, it may seem strange that Jesus would be tempted to worship the devil himself. But upon reading the story, we see that the temptation was “all the kingdoms of the world.” The price for that was prostrating oneself before the devil. Jesus does not succumb. But what compromises do we make to get ahead in the world? Rarely, if ever, will we be tempted to prostrate ourselves before the devil. But we might be asked to neglect family or to choose power instead of the sanctity of a relationship.

In the end, temptation does not approach us as the devil incarnate. Christians have known this for centuries. The story in Matthew’s gospel was meant to be understood broadly, addressing fundamental temptations of humankind for the self. In those circumstances, we rest in our baptism, knowing that our relationship with God is secure. As disciples of Christ, we are confident sons and daughters of God.

Living the Paschal Mystery

The pursuit of bodily pleasures, a God who acts on our behalf for our whims and desires, and our own accumulation of power are fundamental temptations for human beings. Food, shelter, and clothing are all necessary and good as a means of something more. But they are not ends in themselves. God is there by our side, but not as our enforcer. And power and glory are not ends in themselves either.

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Today's gospel invites us to consider the human condition from the viewpoint of Christ who overcame temptation. Turning away bread is not so much about fasting as it is about recognizing that there is more to life than food. Our god is not the belly. When we come to the end of our lives, what will we have? With the power of Christ, let us overcome the temptation to see the value of our lives only in terms of the world. Instead, may we see with the eyes of faith that human relationships are good in and of themselves. Bonds formed in this way last through life eternal.

Focusing the Gospel

Key words and phrases: He fasted for forty days and forty nights

To the point: Throughout the Bible, many numbers are repeated over and over again, such as three, twelve, and forty. The rain of the flood fell for forty days and forty nights while Noah and his family took shelter in the ark. The Israelites wandered in the desert for forty years after leaving a life of slavery in Egypt and before entering into the Promised Land. In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses stays on Mount Sinai for "forty days and forty nights" before receiving the tablets of the law (9:9-10) and then again, forty more days and nights "prostrate before the Lord" (9:18) to atone for the people's worship of the golden calf. Forty signifies a time of trial and testing, purification and preparation for a closer walk with God. Each Lent we enter into our own forty days of purification and preparation before renewing our baptismal promises at Easter.

Connecting the Gospel

to the first reading: In the first reading and the gospel, we have two tales of temptation. In the garden of Eden, the serpent tempts the woman to eat of the fruit that God has forbidden, telling her that to do so will make her and her husband "be like gods." In the desert, the devil confronts Jesus, tempting the one who *is* both fully divine and fully human to create bread from stones, test God's care for him, and worship the devil in return for ruling the kingdoms of the world. In the first reading, Adam and Eve give in to temptation, eat of the forbidden fruit, and as a result have their eyes opened to sin within and around them. In the gospel, Jesus resists the temptations placed before him, remaining true to his nature, "though he was in the form of God, / [he] did not regard equality with God something to be grasped" (Phil 2:6).

to experience: The lie within temptation is that by going against the God, we might have a greater fullness of life. Only in resisting these temptations can true freedom and true abundance be found.

Connecting the Responsorial Psalm

to the readings: Today's psalm presents us with two truths: as human our relationship with God and others is marked by sin in some way, and mercy is great enough to wipe out the effects of sin and wash away all. The second reading from St. Paul's letter to the Romans interprets the sin of our first parents' sin saying, "[T]hrough one transgression / condemnation upon us all." And then continues, referencing Jesus' victory over sin and " [S]o, through one righteous act, / acquittal and life came to all."

to psalmist preparation: In this season of Lent how are you being live deeply into the truth of your own sinfulness and the truth of God's overwhelming mercy?

PROMPTS FOR FAITH-SHARING

In the first reading from Genesis we hear the second creation story, where God creates man out of the earth and then blows into him "the breath of life." How do you experience the breath of God in your life?

The psalmist asks of God, "Give me back the joy of your salvation." When have you known this joy most fully in your life?

In the desert Jesus is tempted to sate his hunger, test God's love for him, and rule the kingdoms of the world by worshiping the devil. Which of these temptations (material goods, testing God, power and glory) is the one you struggle with the most?

First Sunday of Lent, March 1, 2020

Gospel (cont.)

Matt 4:1-11; L22A

Then the devil took him up to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in their magnificence, and he said to him, "All these I shall give to you, if you will prostrate yourself and worship me."

At this, Jesus said to him,

"Get away, Satan!

It is written:

The Lord, your God, shall you worship and him alone shall you serve."

Then the devil left him and, behold, angels came and ministered to him.