

THE FIRST IN LENT  
1 Samuel 17:40-51; Hebrews 4:14-16; Mark 4:1-11

Perhaps when you heard of Jesus' temptation today, you thought to yourself, "That's nice, but it must have been easy for Him." To that, I would have to answer with a resounding, "No, it wasn't easy for Him at all." Remember what our second lesson says: ***"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin."*** When we meet Jesus in the wilderness today, we find Him after forty days of fasting in the isolation of the wilderness, led there by the Spirit immediately after His Baptism. He was hungry. Surely, He was lonely. And it was then that the devil set to work on Him. And the devil knew how serious this work was. He knew who Jesus was. How often didn't the demons confess who Jesus was, only for Him to silence them, after all. To confound Jesus was to undo our eternity. And so the devil set to work on Jesus in a way we cannot even imagine. And He used three different approaches to do so.

The first temptation was an appeal to the belly. Jesus was hungry, and so the devil urged Jesus to turn stones into bread, if He was the Son of God. So also, in times of want, the devil might tempt us to become distracted from the Word of God by a panicked search for what we think we lack or need. Our priorities must always remain in order, especially in such times. We are to ***seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and then all these things will be added unto us as well.***

The second temptation was an appeal to pride or doubt. The devil wanted Jesus to cast Himself from the pinnacle of the temple. There are two reasons we might test God without an explicit command to do so. First, we are overly confident in our righteousness and have confused our relationship with God, forgetting who is who and who is in charge. Second, we might in doubt want God to prove Himself to us, hesitant to trust Him, as if His Word, proven again and again to be true, were not enough to put our faith in Him. Even though He most certainly could have cast Himself from the pinnacle of the temple and lived had He wanted to do so, Jesus refused to put His Father to the test. He trusted that the Father's will was good and right without any spectacular signs or demonstrations.

The third temptation was an appeal to fear and the very human inclination to escape suffering. No one wants to suffer. Not even Jesus looked forward to His suffering. Remember that in Gethsemane He prayed that if it were possible for our salvation to be accomplished in another way this suffering might pass Him by. And so the devil promised Jesus an earthly kingdom without such a high cost. Jesus could rule without pain. In essence, Christ could have become Pilate. And yet this would only have spared Jesus's suffering. We would have remained lost. And even more, Jesus would in this way have broken fellowship with His Father and His

heavenly kingdom. And so Jesus refused. No gain is truly beneficial if gained by displacing God from His rightful place. No temporal life in this earthly kingdom is worth the loss of eternal life in the heavenly kingdom, in the new heaven and earth Jesus has ascended to prepare for us, now that He has died and risen to make us citizens of it.

How did Jesus answer each temptation? Did He use some power you lack? Did He have some resource at His disposal that you do not? No, He used the very weapon He has given you to stave off temptation, to extinguish the flaming darts of the devil. He used the Scriptures.

Our God is not up in heaven wondering what things are like down here. Our heavenly Father knows what it is like to see a Son struggle with temptation. Our Savior knows what it is to have only a trust in God and His Word at your disposal in your weakness. When you pray, “Thy will be done,” in such straits, you are praying the very prayer your Jesus prayed with drops of sweat like blood. I would challenge you to think of even one situation you could face in this world that our Lord has not Himself encountered as well. Abandonment by friends, pain, loneliness, hunger, opposition for doing what is right, unpleasant prospects and the list could go on, He has faced it as well. When you commit your body and life into the hands of your God at such times you do what Christ Himself did throughout His temptation and passion, and most especially, upon the cross.

Yes, Christians will suffer, and yes, Christians will struggle against the flesh, the world, and the old evil foe, and yes, Christians will sometimes feel isolated and lonely in temptation, but you have in such times a Redeemer who has Himself been forsaken by His heavenly Father on the tree of the cross so that His Father’s ear is now forever open and attentive to you in your crosses. And St. Paul’s words to the Corinthians are as true today as they were when he first penned them, ***“No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it”*** (10:13).

In the heat of temptation, in moments of loneliness and desperation, we might at times feel outmanned, but at those times we are like David before Goliath, capable of doing much more with God’s help than most would imagine, especially our old, ancient, wicked, and wily foe. We have Christ, our Rock, who has already crushed the enemy’s head, and we have armor more secure than anything human hands can fashion, His Word and sure promises, to defend us. And with that knowledge we press on, even through the valley of the shadow of death, knowing Christ has gone before us, His Spirit goes within us, and His angels go beside us. Amen.

\*Typed from a preaching outline. Please forgive any typos or grammatical errors.