

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

On the first Sunday in Lent, we always take up the temptation of Jesus. Mark's Gospel definitely has the shortest account, only two verses. Thus, those who put together our lectionary included also Jesus' baptism, which preceded His temptation in our Gospel lesson, and the beginning of Jesus' ministry, which followed His temptation. Nevertheless, I'll focus on those two verses, which is today's theme. They provide us enough fodder to think about Jesus' work for us today by taking on the devil on our behalf and about our own struggle against this old evil foe that means us deadly woe.

Mark's Gospel omits the verbal sparring between Jesus and the devil. We didn't hear Jesus rebuke the devil today, saying, "*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God,*" or "*You shall not put the Lord your God to the test,*" or "*Be gone ... You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve*" (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10). Mark doesn't mention Jesus' 40-day fast that, in part, may motivate our own Lenten fast.

Mark does name Jesus' tempter; he's Satan, not merely the devil. Scripture tells of another encounter between the Lord and this adversary, but Satan's assault that time was not directed at the Son of God, but at the man Job. Thus, when the Son came down from heaven and became man, Satan no doubt thought that he could use that fleshly weakness against Jesus in his temptations — as he uses our flesh today, for Peter reminds us that "*the devil*" is also "*our adversary*" who "*prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking ... to devour [us].*" And we are called on, like Jesus, to "*resist him*" (1 Pet. 5:8-9).

Mark also tells us that Jesus didn't just go out into the wilderness; "*The Spirit ... drove him out into the wilderness.*" What a vivid picture Mark paints of this encounter with Satan! Jesus is driven out, or more literally, cast out, tossed into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit to do battle with this ancient serpent that troubled our parents of old in paradise. The difference, of course, is that the first Adam succumbed to Satan's wiles; the second Adam did not. By the first Adam's sin came sin for all and death; by the second Adam's obedience, including His obedience to death on a cross (Phil. 2:8), righteousness and life were won for all (Rom. 5:17).

Mark says Jesus was cast out into the wilderness not simply to endure one temptation, or two, or three. Jesus spent those 40 days, Mark says, "*being tempted by Satan,*" a constant barrage of temptations that the first Adam clearly could not resist — nor can we, but the second Adam could and did, for He was not merely flesh. He was the eternal Son of God who became flesh by the Holy Spirit of the

virgin Mary. He was tempted in His flesh in every way as we are, yet resisted. He suffered in His flesh as He endured the temptations, and yet remained sinless (Heb. 4:15; 2:18).

This is why we can come to Jesus to help us in our temptations, which are also constant to us, and seductive, though not so open, for Satan does not so much appear to us personally today. That's why many say that Satan is nothing but a myth. But Satan is real; he is shrewd, and he is powerful, and in our fleshly weakness, we need Jesus to help us resist his wiles.

How then does Satan assail us today? His temptations find many access points in our flesh, but especially, through our pride, he takes us "*captive by philosophy and empty deceit*," by "*human tradition[s]*," by "*elemental principles of the world*" that lead us away from Christ and the truth of God found in Holy Scripture (Col. 2:8).

For example, he uses the allure of material prosperity to woo people away from a life in Christ, away from loving service in His name, away from a salvation through faith in Christ that leads to everlasting life to a this world focus on oneself and the things you accumulate, on caring only for oneself. In this universe, you are at the center, and everything revolves around you! Sound's great! You are your own god, but it is deadly, as St. James bears witness: "*each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death*," and with that everlasting torment and anguish (Luke 16:22-25).

Or consider the trust people put in science and scientists. This philosophy has been with us for a while. When science says life came into being billions of years ago in a primordial soup and evolved over billions of years, move over God. We don't need Your superstitions any more. Of course, as Christians we don't reject science and the knowledge it provides, but science has become an idol. The calls in this past year to "follow the science," and "trust the science," do sound a bit religious, don't they? Jesus says, "follow me"; but the priests of science urge us to "follow the science." Jesus says, "believe in me"; the modern gospel is "trust the science." And many people have heeded this altar call and have stayed away from the true Redeemer of the world. And Satan loves it.

Or consider the "Star Wars"-like call to "trust your feelings," rather than the objective Word of God. Real truth is exchanged for "my truth" — what I feel about something is the measure of truth, not what God says. So, a man follows "his truth" that he should leave his wife for his secretary because "it just feels right." Or

a teenager feels that “her truth” is that she is really a he and demands that you indulge the delusion. Families are broken apart, and Satan smiles at the division.

Oh, Satan is a wily foe. In these ways and more, he tempts us to sin, and in this sin he is especially seeking is to divert our eyes from Christ and His sacrifice for our sin and to steal away our faith in Christ. “*Resist him,*” says St. Peter (1 Pet. 5:9).

Resist Satan by remembering first that “*the Lord will provide,*” even as He did for Abraham. We especially remember that the Lord has provided the substitute Lamb, sacrificed for the sins of the world — trust in Him; but He provides in our other needs, too, like daily bread needs, as we confess: “God ... gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers,” and “daily bread includes everything that has to do with the support and needs of the body, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, land, animals, money, goods,” etc. (Luther, Small Catechism, Lord’s Prayer, Explanation to the 4<sup>th</sup> Petition).

Second, even when it comes to temptations, we know: “*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*” (1 Cor. 10:13). You may succumb to the temptation, but confessing your sins, you can trust that God “*is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*” (1 John 1:9).

Third, God gives us armor to withstand the schemes of the devil: “*the belt of truth, ... the breastplate of righteousness, ... the gospel of peace ... the shield of faith ... the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*” (Eph. 6:13-17). Abide in Jesus’ word! Moreover, God invites us to pray and to hear our prayer, and He reminds us that He is the supplier of “*every good gift and every perfect gift,*” and that our prayers offered in faith “*can accomplish much*” (James 5:16 NASB).

Fourth, He encourages us as we look to Him in faith, knowing that the ultimate victory is ours in Christ Jesus who Himself defeated the devil’s temptations and who crushed the serpent’s head with His cross. Therefore, although the devil may assail you for a time — “this world’s prince may still scowl fierce as he will, he can harm us none; he’s judged; the deed is done.” And “*after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.*” Trust in this promise, for “*To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen*” (1 Pet. 5:10-11).

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.