

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Last Sunday, we heard about the bright and glorious Jesus, the eternal Son of the Father, the glory of His Divinity shining through Jesus' flesh and even through His clothes. It was marvelous to behold.

What a difference a week makes. Today we see none of that Divine glory. To be sure, our Gospel takes place immediately after another manifestation of Jesus' Divinity: His baptism, and His commissioning as the Christ. At His baptism we heard similar words: "*You are my beloved Son,*" and the Holy Spirit anointed Him as the Christ—another marvelous theophany.

So that, now filled with the Spirit, Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness to do battle with the devil. And this is no mere feint—neither on the part of the devil nor on Jesus' part.

No, the devil was trying to thwart Jesus' work of atonement, and he took every opportunity that presented itself. The first opportunity was while Jesus was still a child, before He had fulfilled all righteousness for mankind, before He had stepped into the Jordan River to take onto Himself the sins of the whole world. Then, the devil sought to have Jesus killed, but the Lord warned Joseph. The Holy Family fled to Egypt for protection, and Herod had the little boys of Bethlehem killed.

This is now the second opportunity for the devil to stop Jesus' atoning work in its tracks. This time the devil's plans involved getting the beloved Son to sin just once, for one sin, one mistake, one flaw was all it would take to make the perfect Lamb of God unfit for the sacrifice that takes away the sins of the world.

And so for 40 days, the devil tempts Him, exploiting what the devil thinks are points of weakness. He starts with Jesus' physical needs. Jesus had been fasting while in the wilderness. Our text tells us and it's important: "*He was hungry.*" "[C]ommand this stone to become bread," the devil enticed Jesus. But Jesus trusted the Father to supply His daily bread: "*It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone,'*" Jesus responds.

Second, the devil assails Jesus with those fleshly desires: power, riches, comfort, glory. Who among us hasn't thought about how nice those would be, especially if you didn't have to work for them: "*Lord, just give me that winning Powerball ticket.*" And so the devil takes Jesus to a high place and in a moment of time showed Him all the kingdoms of the world. "*They're yours,*" he said to Jesus, "*without poverty and weakness, without suffering and sacrifice, without forsakenness and death, if only you will bow down and worship me.*"

Jesus does not budge from His purpose: *“It is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.’”*

Third, the devil tries to get the second Adam to fall prey to the sin of the first Adam: doubt. *“Did God really say?”* the devil asked Adam and Eve, and they began to doubt that God had told them the whole truth. *“Didn’t God say, ‘He’ll command His angels concerning you, to guard you.’ Didn’t He say, ‘You won’t strike your foot against a stone?’ So throw yourself down from the temple. You’ll be fine,”* the devil cooed. Jesus does not fall prey to the devil’s illegitimate use of the Scripture.

Jesus had had enough. He rebuffs the devil’s temptation: *“It is said, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’”*

Jesus had successfully turned back all of the devil’s sorties against Him this time. *“And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.”* But as you just heard, the devil was not done yet. The open, frontal assaults had not worked. He would use a more subtle approach in the future, even using Jesus’ own disciples to try to deflect Him from the path the Father had chosen for Him.

So, no this was no feint by devil; nor was this a feint by the Son. This defeat of the devil is part and parcel of Jesus’ work of atonement for mankind. As we prayed on Wednesday, *“by Your baptism, fasting, and temptation ... Help us, good Lord.”* Jesus’ fasting and temptation were listed along with such major events in Jesus’ salvific work as His incarnation and nativity, His agony and bloody sweat in Gethsemane, His cross and Passion on Calvary, His death and burial, His resurrection and ascension, and His sending of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost.

Indeed, this is the work of Jesus, God in the **flesh**, that is, the *“one mediator between God and men, the **man** Christ Jesus.”* From incarnation to cross and burial, this is the work of the man Jesus not always or fully using His divine power. In catechism terms we call that His “state of humiliation.” To be sure, His resurrection, ascension, and session at the right hand of God from whence He sent the Holy Spirit are also the work of the man Jesus, but those in His state of exaltation. His temptation is the work of the man Jesus in His state of humiliation.

The temptation I’m trying to ward off here in you is the thought welling up in you: “Of course, Jesus could strive with Satan and win; He is God. He’s not like me; or I’ve got an excuse.” We are without excuse. Jesus is God, but here in this text we do not see Jesus putting His Divine power on display. Rather we see the weakened, hungry, fleshly Jesus truly being tempted by the devil, just as you and I are tempted. It was not by His Divine power that the man Jesus overcame the devil—the man Jesus as Adam was supposed to be but fell, and as we are not now

for we are simply unable not to sin, the man as we will once again be in the resurrection as we are perfected in Christ.

Jesus is the true man, Himself without sin, *“who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin,”* but He is carrying our sin. Therefore, He is the man *“pierced for our transgressions ... crushed for our iniquities.”* He became true man so that we, fallen man, might be healed. Indeed, as President Harrison reminded us last week, Gregory of Nazianzus, one of the Cappadocian Fathers wrote, *“that which He has not assumed He has not healed.”* And so, God's Son assumed our flesh so that the Lord might lay our iniquity upon Him, as Isaiah wrote, so that also *“upon him [would be placed] the chastisement — the punishment — that brought us peace, and with his wounds – thorns and nails and spear — we are healed.”*

Jesus defeated the devil on this occasion, not by His Divine power, but as true man. That is not to say that He had no Divine weapon to use against *“the schemes of the devil.”* He did, and He wielded it: namely, *“the sword of the Spirit, ... the word of God.”*

You have this same weapon at your disposal, and you need it, for the devil continues to prowl and rage against Christ and His body, the church. So wield it as you *“wrestle ... against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”* Read it. Mark it. Learn it. Keep this *“word ... near you, in your mouth and in your heart’ (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim).”* For it's by this word that you come to *“you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead.”* It's by this word preached and heard and believed that you call on the name of the Lord. It's by this word that God's grace is communicated to you, you believe and are saved with all of His riches bestowed upon you.

Dear saints of God, we have an embarrassment of riches in this country. We have God's word in our own language and more resources to dig into it than one can shake a stick at.

So, yes, let us pray, *“Blessed Lord ... grant that we may so hear [the Holy Scriptures], read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them that, by patience and comfort of Your holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life,”* which is ours through faith in Jesus Christ, *“true God ... and also true man, born of the virgin Mary,”* our Lord, our Redeemer and Savior, our Substitute.

In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.