

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

The First Sunday in Lent always focuses on Jesus' forty day fast and His assault by the devil. This year we learn about it from the Gospel of Luke.

But juxtaposed with this text are also the Epistle focusing on believing in and confessing Jesus and His word, and the tract verse: "*Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil*" (Eph. 6:11), focusing on the devil's attacks on us sinners; and there's the collect in which we prayed for the Lord, who led the people of Israel through 40 years of wandering in the wilderness into the promised land, to lead us by our Savior "through the wilderness of this world" and into "the glory of the world to come" (Collect for First Sunday in Lent).

Therefore, it's important to treat these texts with some discipline, for it's easy to jumble them together into a casserole of pious sounding words, but that lose their distinctiveness. In fact, I may have succeeded in doing that today.

But we begin with Jesus' temptation, for as Francis Pieper wrote, "the saving grace of God is not absolute, founded on God's power, but has been gained by Christ. True, we generally call the doctrine of justification the central article of the Christian doctrine .... But this is directly based on the doctrine of Christ, on the doctrine" of the person and work of Christ, the God-man (Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, II:55).

Thus, as we look at Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, we need to keep in mind that this was part of Jesus' vicarious work on behalf of sinners. Luke is not teaching us how we can ourselves overcome the "crafts and assaults of the devil" (Litany, *LSB*, p. 288). Rather, Jesus "*partook of the [children's flesh and blood], [so] that ... he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil*" (Heb. 2:14). That's why He was "*made like his brothers in every respect*" (Heb. 2:17). As John says, "*The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil*" (1 John 3:8), to deliver us "from all sin, from all error, from all evil" (Litany).

And so, having fasted for forty days, Jesus was tempted with a temporal thing: His belly, as we are tempted with such things: "clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all [we] have ... all that [we] need to support this body and life" (Luther, Small Catechism, First Article). Jesus did not succumb. We fail daily, but Jesus did not fall prey to the desire to satisfy His hunger by using His divine power to change the stones into bread. "*Man shall not live by bread alone.*" He trusted that God would "rescue [Him] from every evil of body and soul, possessions and reputation" and finally return

Him to His rightful place at the Father's right hand (Small Catechism, Lord's Prayer).

The devil tempted Jesus with authority and glory over the kingdoms of the world—something we all yearn for. How enticing this offer must have been—none of our sins to carry; no poverty or weakness, no suffering and shame, no pain and death. *“If you worship me,”* the devil said. It was a lie by “a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44). There was no easier way, not for God, both loving and just—no forgiveness without the shedding of blood (Heb. 9:22), no atonement without a sacrifice, no exaltation without first becoming a servant, without a humbling death on a cross (Phil. 2:7-9). Jesus could not fulfill the Father's will by turning to the devil and worshiping him, but only by worshiping the Lord God and serving Him only. Jesus did not succumb as we do.

One more flaming dart of temptation was still in the devil's quiver. It had smitten Adam of old; might it find its target in the Second Adam? The devil took Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple and began to speak the buttery words that had worked in the innocence of the Garden, “Did God really say ...”? “Did God really say you're going to die by being lifted up on a cross? Let's test that proposition, as the Scripture says. Throw yourself down. If that's so, the Father will send His angels to bear you up.” Jesus had had enough. *“You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.”*

Jesus, the Second Adam, had succeeded where the first Adam failed. He had been tempted *“in every respect ... as we are, yet [He remained] without sin”* (Heb. 4:15). He would become the lamb without blemish offered up by Himself as the merciful and faithful high priest, making *“propitiation for the sins of the people”* (Heb. 2:17), for although Jesus defeated the devil here, ultimately it is *“through death”* that He would destroy the devil, and a couple years hence, Jesus would accomplish that, too—all for us, and for our salvation.

But with Jesus' victory now complete, we might ask, *“How does this affect me?”* That is, how is Christ's victory over sin, death, and the devil made my own? So we come to the Epistle. It's through faith in Christ the Victor, as St. Paul teaches us: *“For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.”* It's by believing in Him and His works, and not by your own. It's by believing in Christ, that is, by identifying with Christ—being united with Him by Holy Baptism, following Him and His word, communing with Him in the supper of His body and blood given for you—not by identifying with some ethnic (Jew or Greek), racial (black, white, brown, yellow), social (rich, poor, elite, common), sexual or gender identity (male or female). Our identity is in Christ.

And this Christian identity should mean something. While the Gospel text of Jesus' own temptation before us today is not about teaching us how to overcome temptation, we do know that His temptations enable His sympathy for our own temptations, and His suffering enables Him *"to help those who are being tempted"* (Heb. 2:18)—after all, we know that *"temptations are sure to come"* (Luke 17:1).

But the Scripture is clear that Christians are to try to avoid them. Wise Solomon teaches: *"Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of the evil. Avoid it; do not go on it; turn away from it and pass on"* (Prov. 4:14-15). Again, *"Thorns and snares are in the way of the crooked; whoever guards his soul will keep far from them"* (Prov. 22:5). Scripture warns of "deceivers" (Eph. 5:6), so when it comes to false teachers, Scripture says, *"avoid them"* (Rom. 16:17).

For, you know the dangers of temptation: *"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"* (James 1:14-15), that is, unbelief, profaning the name of God or denying Him (Prov. 30:9).

So, yes, *"Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil."* *"Stand firm ... having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication"* (Eph. 6:13-18).

Yes, pray, that your "Father in heaven would rescue [you] from every evil of body and soul, possessions and reputation, and finally, when [your] last hour comes, give [you] a blessed end, and graciously take [you] from this valley of sorrow to Himself in heaven" (Small Catechism, Lord's Prayer).

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