

Homily: 1st Sunday of Lent: Cycle C: 2016: Dt 26: 4-10; Ps 91; Rom 10: 8-13; Lk 4: 1-13

“Temptation”

“If men knew the meaning of eternity, they would do anything to amend their lives.”

Blessed Jacinta Marto.

“This dramatic situation of ‘the whole world [which] is in the power of the evil one (see

1 Jn 5 19; cf. 1 Pet 5:8) makes man’s life a battle:

*“The whole of man’s history has been the story of dour combat with the powers of evil, stretching, so our Lord tells us, from the very dawn of history until the last day. Finding himself in the midst of the battlefield man has to struggle to do what is right, and it is at great cost to himself, and aided by God’s grace, that he succeeds in achieving his own inner integrity.” (From the **Vatican II document: *Guadium et Spes (the pastoral constitution of the Church in the Modern World) par 37 nu 2 in the Catechism of the Catholic Church paragraph 409***). As a side note, there are some great reflections on how to best deal with, and the Divine purpose of, temptations in the spiritual classic book *The Imitation of Christ*.*

1. **How we deal with temptation determines whether we grow in holiness on a daily basis, or spin our spiritual wheels, or fall farther away from the Lord.** As long as we live in this world we cannot be without temptations. As it says in the **book of Job** in the OT, “*man’s life on earth is a temptation.*” Or as **St. Peter** cautions us in his first letter in the NT, “*Bow humbly under God’s mighty hand, so in due time He may lift you up on high. Cast all your cares on Him because He cares for you. Stay sober and alert. Your opponent the devil is prowling like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, solid in your faith, realizing the brotherhood of believers is undergoing the same sufferings throughout the world (1 Peter 5: 6-10).* We need to be realistic in knowing that we will encounter the same three main categories of temptation as Jesus Himself faced in the desert today in the Gospel. The **first one** is: material and physical enticements, the temptation **to settle for the sensual and material things of this world**, be it money, comfort, sensual pleasures, overemphasis on food, drink, sex, our physical health, material gadgets, etc. **Jesus shows us how to counter this temptation:** to recall the reality that, “*One does not live on bread alone.*” The

- human person is made for more: namely, spiritual union with the Trinity now and in eternity - but we can reject it in our shortsightedness, and the devil knows this all too well, so he tries to tempt us with this: **settling for less: the 1st temptation.**
2. Well if the devil doesn't succeed at one type of temptation, he will try, and try again to bring us down. So onto **the second** category of temptation: the devil says to Jesus after showing Him in a vision all the kingdoms of the world: "*I will give to you all this power and glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I may give it to whomever I wish. All this will be yours, if you worship me.*" (What delusions of grandeur satan has! - he thinks he is equal to God Himself, which was his downfall: his immense pride!) **How is this temptation manifested in real human life?** Satan knows most of us are not going to worship him directly, so how does he try to get us? **To strive for power over others, or to think we can be the master of our own universe to the neglect of God's loving rule over us.** We see this temptation when we are enticed to control others, or to step on people to get ahead in life. Or to exert our own self-will and ignore God's commandments and the teachings of the Catholic Church on faith and morals; after all, to use satan's logic, *don't we know our lives better than anyone, why do we need God and the Church telling us what to do?!* **Pretty scary logic** and yet it is a temptation you and I face on a daily basis! Jesus gives us the counter to this scary temptation, "*It is written, you shall worship the Lord, your God, and Him alone shall you serve.*" The thought of our minds and hearts needs to be: "*not my will but your will O' Lord be done,*" as Jesus prays from the depths of His being in the agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, in a spirit of humility and total dependence on the Father, instead of full of pride, like satan. Jesus will give us the grace to imitate His **filial love** for the Father in the Holy Spirit, but only if we are humble enough to ask on a daily basis! **Self-will is:** the 2nd temptation.
3. Well if the first two temptations don't work, the devil will try a **third** way to entice us. This is **the temptation to presumption.** He took Jesus up to the parapet of the Temple and said to Him, "*If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written: He will command His angels concerning you, to*

guard you, and with their hands they will support you, lest you dash your foot against a stone.” As you can see by now **the devil knows the Bible very well**, so be careful not to get into a debate with him in your mind when you are tempted, but instead do as St. Therese of the Child Jesus always recommends when faced with temptation from the world, our own fallen nature, or particularly the devil: **Look at Jesus and ask for His strength to resist!** **How do we see this third type of temptation to presumption manifested in our daily lives?** *Well we see this when we are tempted to convince ourselves that we don't have to take the difficult but necessary steps to be a good follower of Christ, according to His standards and not our own: to continue fighting against temptation instead of giving up, e.g., one stops going to Confession regularly (discouragement is the greatest trap to the pious soul); to live a pure life instead of living a sexually immoral life and treating others as objects for our sensual gratification; to be sober instead of a drunkard; to be generous with others instead of selfish; to go to Mass every week and on the Holy Days instead of just when we feel like it; to refrain from Holy Communion when we need to go to Confession first; to give God quality time in prayer each day instead a few scraps of our time, etc.* **Basically the temptation to put off our conversion in Christ in all areas of our life until LATER, MAYBE MUCH LATER - when it will be too late!** After all to use satan's logic, *doesn't the Lord love you anyway? - you don't have to OBEY Him that is so passé and old fashioned, get with the times!* **Jesus gives us the counter to this tricky appeal** to our pride and desire to take the easy road always - instead of the narrow road that is difficult, but leads to eternal bliss after the battle of this earthly life - by saying to satan in reply, *“It is also said, “**You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.**”* After that, the Gospel says *“when the devil had finished every temptation, he departed from him for a time.”* **Satan will be back!** **But if we remember to turn to Jesus, we will never be tried beyond your strength** (*see: 1 Corth 10:13*) and through the test of temptation, if passed, will grow in virtue and spiritual strength on a daily basis for the glory of God, and ultimately our eternal salvation - **if we persevere in God's ways.** May our Lenten practices of prayer, fasting and almsgiving help us to do this ever more faithfully. God bless you.