

In Nomine Iesu

Invocavit - The First Sunday in Lent 2022

In temptation we rely on the incarnate Word of God – Matthew 4:1-11

“Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, ‘If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.’ But He answered and said, ‘It is written, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”’ Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, ‘If you are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: “He shall give His angels charge concerning you,” and, “In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.”’ Jesus said to him, ‘It is written again, “You shall not tempt the Lord your God.”’ Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, ‘All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.’ Then Jesus said to him, ‘Away with you, Satan! For it is written, “You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.”’ Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him.”

Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the second Adam and Savior of us all. Dearly beloved in the Lord:

At the heart of the Christian faith is the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is eternal, “begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.” While He is eternal according to his divine nature, His human nature had a beginning, just as we confess, “Who for us men and for our salvation was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary and was made man.” The eternal Son of the eternal Father was made man.

I

But was Jesus truly man in every respect? Yes, really, truly, in every respect. The Epistle to the Hebrews says concerning Jesus: “Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death He might destroy him who holds the power of death - that is, the devil - and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death ... He Himself suffered when He was tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted.” (Hebrews 2:14-18)

There’s nothing essential to being human that wasn’t true of Jesus. He was born. He ate, drank, and slept. He was subject to every danger, indignity, and disease that we face. He became tired, thirsty, and hungry. He suffered, cried, celebrated, and mourned. He experienced both joy and sorrow. And, as we know especially well in this Lenten season, He died. Jesus was not a pretend man then, nor is He now. He was, is, and will always be true man. In fact, there is only one thing that we can say about humanity that we cannot say about Jesus. We cannot say that Jesus sinned.

This is where the popular idea of Christ stands in opposition to the truth. People assume sin is an essential part of being human, that death is part of life, that one would be somewhat less than human if he had no sin. But the very opposite is true. Sin is what distorts humanity. It makes us less than God created us to be. Only the

sinless Son of God can make us human in the way God intended us to be. He did so by assuming our nature, offering His obedience in place of our disobedience, His righteousness in place of our sin, His innocence in place of our guilt.

The devil's first temptation concerned what we might call value. A house is more valuable than a car, a car more valuable than clothes. But what good are house, car, or clothes to a starving man? What could be more valuable to him than food? After forty days and nights of fasting, Jesus wasn't just hungry. While it is true that the human body becomes accustomed to hunger early on in a fast and is not hungry in the sense that you and I are hungry before lunch or dinner, something else is true. The fasting body fuels itself by burning fat in order to keep itself warm, keep its lungs functioning and heart beating. But after 40 days, Jesus' body would have run out of fat and begun to burn muscle. When that happens, one is going to starve to death if he doesn't eat soon. Yet in the face of imminent starvation Jesus rejects the devil's temptation to make stones into bread. He confesses that "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

This is pure obedience by a singularly pure man. It is the obedience we owe God, but do not give. By reckoning God's word, not just in its entirety but in its every word, to be more valuable than what our bodies need to survive, Jesus condemns the false values of our fallen humanity. Ask yourself: Who cares about God's word today? When has God's word been so despised as today? Instruction in the eternal truths of God's word is replaced with advice for successful living – successful by whose measure? Doctrinal indifference is no longer called unbelief, which it is, but promoted as a positive Christian virtue, even as the holy mysteries of the faith are dismissed as being either irrelevant. In a day when the so called good life consists in the accumulation of things and the satisfaction of every conceivable human urge, who really believes that man lives on every word that comes from the mouth of God? Many even think they are doing God a favor by going to church. Many are ready and willing to speculate about all things spiritual, but cannot stay silent long enough to be instructed by God in His word.

II

Living on every word that comes from the mouth of God begins with trusting that every word God says matters, and is true. Jesus, the perfect man, the representative man who takes our place, trusted every word of God. He didn't need to cooperate with the devil to get his daily bread. He could and did put God's word first, even before His bodily needs. And God took care of Him, just as He promised to do.

If the **first** temptation was to **challenge the value of God' word**, the **second** was to **disconnect faith from the word**. Doesn't God care for You, Jesus? Shouldn't You be able to throw yourself off the highest point of the temple? If Your Father cares for You, will He not save You? You say You trust in Him. Well, put Him to the test? Or are You afraid that He will fail the test? Where is Your faith in Him?

God doesn't fail. He cares for us. He keeps all the promises He makes. But note carefully, He binds Himself to what He promises, not to some test we choose to lay on Him. Where has God promised that He will do miracles to protect us from our own folly? You shall not put the Lord your God to the test, Jesus said. He does not need to prove Himself to you. His promises are sufficient; they are all you need.

The **third** temptation was the most brazen, but the most powerful. “Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, ‘All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.’” The devil says he can give the kingdoms of the world, but he can’t. The world is God’s. The fact that the devil can influence leaders of the world – witness as is happening in Ukraine! - doesn’t change this. Satan can’t make good on his promises. So when we set aside our duty to God and our worship of God for the sake of something else, whether popularity, wealth, power, security or self-gratification, we are putting our trust in the lies of the devil. But he cannot deliver on anything he promises. Jesus knew that he was trying to **lure him away from the world that the Father so loved**. In His perfect humanity Jesus knew the devil for the father of lies that he is.

But the devil has plenty of success with Christians. He leads them into sin, despair, and finally unbelief. Christians can and do fall away from the faith. He succeeds when Christians ignore or despise the word of God. But wait, you say, if Jesus, the incarnate Word of God, quoted the Bible to drive the devil away, shouldn’t we do the same? Shouldn’t we follow and rely on His example? Dear friends, we will not overcome the temptations raised against our faith by the devil, the world, and our own flesh, by relying on our skill with the word of God. No, we must simply trust the greatest truth of God’s word, that Christ alone is the way, the truth, and the life.

Dear friends, the devil’s attack on us is always an attack on Christ. He alone is our substitute, our brother, who performed what was required of us. When we fail the test, He passed. When we sin, He obeyed. When we bring on ourselves the anger of God for our lack of trust, Jesus removed that anger by His perfect trust. When the devil makes us do something evil, he didn’t make Jesus do it. So, we cling to Jesus. It drives the devil to rage when we claim as ours the righteousness of Jesus, when we believe and confess that Christ’s obedience God counts as ours, His death has paid for the entire penalty for our sins. The accuser couldn’t and cannot accuse Jesus, so he cannot accuse those who trust in Him, who are baptized into his death and resurrection, who are clothed with His perfect righteousness.

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The devil wants us to disregard Christ as our Substitute, Mediator, and Redeemer, and leave us with only Christ as our example. The devil loves nothing more than to have us regard as dull and impractical any study of the person and work of Jesus Christ. He loves us to disregard the lessons of the Lenten season, the lessons that focus on the life, suffering, death of the Savior of world for us. He loves it, because he knows that it is only when **we are lured away** from Christ the Savior of sinners - **who was not lured away from us!** - that we can be misled and destroyed.

We look to Jesus, who in the weakness of His starving body defied the temptations of the devil. When Satan raises the question in our hearts as he did to Eve, “Has God indeed said?” we do indeed point to God’s **written word** that speaks truth, but even more to the **incarnate Word** who redeemed us, letting Him speak for us, just as He did in the wilderness those 40 days. And we know we cannot lose even if we fail, because Jesus, our Savior, did not fail, but has already won for us the victory. And He will never leave us or forsake us. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria