



## **A Lenten Discipline** **Deuteronomy 26:1-11; Luke 4:1-13** **Reverend Giuseppe Mattei (March 6, 2022)**

"Last Sunday I found a wallet packed with money down by the church."

"Did you give it back?"

"Not yet. I'm still trying to decide if it's a temptation from the devil or the answer to a prayer."

Was Jesus actually tempted or is this biblical account simply a metaphor? How can God be tempted? Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell us that soon after he was baptized, Jesus was brought by the Spirit into the wilderness for forty days and forty nights. Scholars tend to agree that the evangelists would not have invented the temptations of Jesus. It must have come from something Jesus shared with his disciples about his own experience.

Jesus "was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil." At first, it may sound like the Spirit led Jesus into the desert to face temptations. This prompts the question whether God leads us into temptation as we pray in the Lord's Prayer. But although we hear in the Bible that there are instances where God has allowed for the testing of the human spirit,<sup>1</sup> James (ch. 1) puts that to bed by affirming that temptations do not come from God:

12 Blessed is anyone who endures temptation. Such a one has stood the test and will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him. 13 No one, when tempted, should say, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil and he himself tempts no one. 14 But one is tempted by one's own desire, being lured and enticed by it; 15 then, when that desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and that sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death.

Jesus of Nazareth was a human being and just like us, he experienced temptations through his whole life and not just in the desert.<sup>2</sup> He put himself in our shoes and he learned what it means to be human, temptations and suffering included. But he also knew that there is power in a life spent for God.<sup>3</sup> He does not use his divine resources. In fact, the letter to the Philippians affirms that Christ Jesus,

though he was in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God  
as something to be exploited,  
but emptied himself,  
taking the form of a slave,  
being born in human likeness.

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<sup>1</sup> [Does God tempt us to sin? | GotQuestions.org](https://www.gotquestions.org/Does-God-tempt-us-to-sin/);

<sup>2</sup> Hebrew 2:17

<sup>3</sup> See also 1 Cor 10:13

And being found in human form,  
he humbled himself  
and became obedient to the point of death—  
even death on a cross.<sup>4</sup>

Luke tells us that Jesus used only the resources at his disposal: the Word of God and the holy Spirit of which he was full. Now, even the devil used the Word of God but was missing the Holy Spirit. And even with the quotation of Scripture he didn't do such a great job. So, Jesus needed to discern and counter-quote the Scriptures from a spiritual perspective. One cannot use fragments of the Bible out of context but must look at the spirit of the letter to see how it all fits together in line with the plan of God to save.

When the devil realized he couldn't get his way with Jesus, he left only to return at a better time. But the devil miscalculated: there wouldn't be a better time with Jesus. Jesus kept faithful, not by claiming his rights or showing off his power, but by humbling himself, limiting himself, becoming vulnerable through the incarnation, completely identifying with human beings, and totally trusting in the supportive power and consistent presence of God.

It is only with his Father's help that Jesus was able to overcome the temptations presented to him by the devil. Jesus surely felt the desires of his humanity in the desert: hunger, pride, and power. How hard he must have fought against his human desires! How weak he must have felt! Jesus understood, though, that his strength to overcome temptations came by turning to his Father and letting God help him decide what was right and what was wrong for him.

We can be grateful to Luke for telling us that Jesus did not face temptations only in the desert; it was not a one-time event for Jesus any more than it is for us. With that in mind, today's Gospel invites us into our 40 days of Lent as a time to contemplate and learn from Jesus' decisions about how to be a faithful Child of God. He did it to show us how to do the same.

Although the enemy may tempt us, we do not need to doubt our adoption as children of our heavenly Father. We can resist. God's intention is to reveal Himself as a caring and providing Father. God gives us what we need on a daily basis. We can turn to God in full trust.

Twelve-step programs offer some helpful advice to all of us. Be careful when you are hungry, angry, lonely, or tired (HALT). That's when we are most vulnerable to poor choices and to the tricks of the evil spirit.

This Lent, we are invited to make that same bold turn toward God. And we do not make this turn alone. Both Jesus and the Spirit are here helping us as we turn to God.

Let us turn to God and ask for our daily bread, including a good dose of the Spirit of Jesus to make choices in alignment with our identity as a Child of God. Let us immerse ourselves in the Word of Life which gives us strength and guidance in our daily decisions. And let us approach the Sacraments with a spirit of hunger and enjoy our faith community with a spirit of poverty, fully trusting the benevolent presence of our God.

May our forty-day discipline deepen our awareness of God' love for us. Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> Philippians 2:6-8