

Parched place the Judean desert. Rocks...dry soil...sand. Yet, if you are not too absorbed in your thoughts, you could spot [ravens](#), [Nubian goats](#), reptiles of all sorts and venomous vipers, too. And until recently even [Arabian leopards](#) which have gone extinct due to illegal hunting.

That's where Jesus, "full of the Holy Spirit," went – or better where the Spirit led him – after his baptism by the Jordan. Did you notice? It's the Spirit of God who moves and directs him: There are two mentions of the Holy Spirit in the same sentence (Luke 4:1).

Jesus grew in a spiritual household by a mother full of grace and an adoptive father attuned to the divine. He was surrounded by a spiritual community of relatives and villagers who attended to his pious upbringing.¹ As a result, he "grew and became strong, filled with wisdom, and the favor of God was upon him."² He grew and moved in and by the Spirit.³ So did John,⁴ and so does Paul recommend of us.⁵

As an adult, Jesus came to the River Jordan where he knew that John was baptizing people. He also decided to be baptized, and after a moment of prayer, the Spirit came upon

¹ Luke 1:28-35.42; 2:21-22.40.41-44.52

² Luke 2:40; see also a few verses down, Luke 2:52

³ Luke 2:41-52

⁴ Luke 1:66.80

⁵ 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Ephesians 4:15; Philippians 4:6-7; Galatians 5:22-23

him and a voice from heaven was heard to declare: “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”⁶

Did you hear that? God is “well pleased” with Jesus. What does it take to please God? What effort must be made? What sacrifices? How do we know God delights in us?

Maybe I can give up something for Lent. Maybe I can give something away, something I really treasure to show to God what great sacrifice I am capable of. Or, maybe, I can say more prayers until I exhaust all thoughts and words, until I cover all the people I know who need a prayer. Maybe I can donate to one more charity organization.

But before we get to do any work of charity, we may want to pay attention to who we are and Whom we trust. *Being* always precedes *doing*: it speaks to the state of mind and to our motivation.

Note what is going on in Luke’s story of Jesus’ temptations in the desert. The devil didn’t just show up at the end of the forty days of prayer and fasting. He was there all along tormenting Jesus.

So, this is an initial truth to recon with: every time we set ourselves to do something in line with the will of God, the

⁶ Luke 3:22

devil is present, trying to persuade us otherwise. He is there; you may count on it.

But God's Spirit is also there, accompanying Jesus in his holy purpose. God is present in the life of God's holy people who seek God's kingdom. There is no need to be scared of the evil lurking out there: God is out there also and watching over us. But God requires our attention and intention to live according to God's ways, which are never forced on anyone. Living with intentionality and purpose keeps God's promises prominent, strengthens our resolution and allows us to live the power of the Spirit at our disposal.⁷

Jesus resisted the attack of the devil throughout his forty days in the desert. He was not disarmed and did not capitulate. At the end, when he was exhausted and famished, the devil's intentions were made clear through specific temptations: to distract and reorient Jesus' firm commitment to live by the Law of God. A life not centered on God is a life outside of God's realm, where there is darkness, selfishness, greed, pride and fear.

The first temptation has to do with physical needs: turn this stone into bread. Jesus could easily do that, but he chose to

⁷ See the gift of the Spirit in Romans 16:1-8; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4:11

trust God to provide a greater Bread, the living Word of God, and all that one needs on a daily basis.

Secondly, he was tempted to bow to Satan rather than to God in exchange for glory and power. But Jesus was firm in attesting that true glory comes from obedience to God and by living in God's presence.

Lastly, he was tempted to challenge God's seriousness in loving and saving him. But Jesus replied with a strong rebuke: there is no need to test God.

Then the devil left him alone but not for ever: he is always ready for another fight. Luke tells us that the devil "departed from him until an opportune time." (v. 13)

What temptations do in anyone's life is to make us doubt our identity and worth in the eyes of God. Temptations insinuate that we are on our own in the world, that we need to fend for ourselves, that we can easily achieve greatness and power on our own. Temptations want us to believe that we need to fight hard in this world if we are to survive its harshness, if we are to end up on top. Temptations instruct us that the resources for our survival are limited, and we are in competition with everybody else. We can only count on ourselves. So, we lie, we cheat and make all sorts of unholy compromises and associations. We live anxiously.

But not Jesus and not a follower of Jesus.

Temptations are opportunities to revisit who we are and Whose we are. They are chances to sharpen our trust in God and practice our faith.

In his time of need, Jesus did not waver and did not retreat. He was focused on God's love for him and his trust in God's providence. He was convinced that God's way was better than any human attempt at making one's life more comfortable. He did have the divine power to transform his current difficulties and affirm his status in the presence of the devil, but that would defy the purpose of his incarnation. Unity with God was the only power he needed. The way he lived and loved showed true power.

In a radical commitment to and solidarity with the last, the list and the lost, Jesus has renounced any privilege procured to him by his divine status and has chosen the way of humility and lowliness.⁸ Jesus has chosen to trust the ever assuring presence of God, who never sleeps nor slumbers⁹ and sees all,¹⁰ and is ready to intervene on behalf of the poor, the alien, the orphan and the widow.¹¹

Jesus chose the way of self-emptying and did not pursue self-interest. He knew God cared for him. His purpose was to

⁸ Philippians 2

⁹⁹ Psalm 121

¹⁰ Hebrews 4:13

¹¹ Isaiah 41:10; Deuteronomy 10:18

seek the will of the Father as he taught his disciples: the Father will take care of the rest.¹²

Jesus has renounced his own wellbeing and prioritized others. He's put God first and the attempt of the devil was to dissuade him to care for himself first, not to trust God.

That is our constant temptation, the constant whisper in our ear: you can do it on your own; you must do it on your own; you must accumulate power and material goods; you must work on your personal affirmation and glory; you got to force to make your way...no matter the cost.

But the cost is suffering for oneself and others.

Jesus would never do that. He'd rather become vulnerable and choose to live non-violently.

May our Lenten journey be a time of repentance and reconsideration. May we come to appreciate his Way. Amen.

¹² Luke 12:27-34