

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT
Gospel: Saint Matthew 4: 1-11

On Temptation

17.1 First Point

Today's Gospel, informing us that Jesus Christ went off into the desert,¹¹⁷ does not say that he did this to withdraw from the company of men, or to pray, but to be tempted, and this helps us understand that the first step we must take when we wish to give ourselves to God is to leave the world in order to prepare ourselves to fight this world and all the enemies of our salvation.

It is in seclusion from the world, says Saint Ambrose, that we should expect to be tempted and tried in many ways. The Wise Man likewise forewarns us of this when he says that those who enter the service of God should prepare themselves for temptation.¹¹⁸ In fact, it is very advantageous for them, because it is one of the best ways to free themselves entirely from sin and from affection for sin.

Have you always thought that in order to give yourself entirely to God you must be prepared to be tempted? Are you not upset when some temptation comes to you? In the future be ready to meet temptation at any time, and so draw from it all the benefit that God wishes it to accomplish in you.

17.2 Second Point

What should induce a soul truly given to God to be always ready to meet temptation is what Job says: man's life is a temptation, or, according to the Vulgate, a constant warfare.¹¹⁹ From this we may conclude that if God wishes a soul to be tempted in this world, it is because there is need to struggle constantly against the demon and one's own passions and inclinations, which will continue to wage war as long as the soul will be in this life. This led Saint Jerome to say that it is impossible for our soul to escape temptation in this life, that if Jesus Christ our Savior himself was tempted, no one can hope to cross the stormy sea of this life without being exercised by temptation.

Have you been expecting to do battle constantly with the demon and against yourself? Since you have left the world, have you been constantly on your guard against yourself, as you must be? Do you have what you need to resist the demon and not give yourself over to the pleasures of the senses? Be convinced that it is a great misfortune not to experience any temptation, because this is a sign that you do not overcome yourself in any way, and you allow yourself to be easily conquered by your passions.

17.3 Third Point

The angel who accompanied young Tobias said to his father: Because you were pleasing to God, it was necessary for you to be tested by temptation.¹²⁰ This should fully convince you of the necessity of trials of this sort, since it is temptation that will procure for you an abundance of grace. So, do not believe, as Saint Chrysostom remarks, that God has abandoned you when you are tempted. On the contrary, this is one of the greatest signs you can have that God is particularly concerned about your salvation, since he gives you the opportunity to fight and exercise yourself in the practice of virtue, and in this way strengthen yourself in it. For little by little we acquire sublime virtue when we remain constant, unshaken, and inflexible in its practice despite the violent temptations that attack us.

So, consider it a great misfortune when you are not tempted; this is in reality a sign of reprobation and of God's abandonment. For he exercises those he loves,¹²¹ and is pleased when he sees them tempted, as was the case with Job and Tobias, two of his most faithful servants.

117 Mt 4:1
118 Sir 2:1

119 Jb 7:1
120 Tb 12:13

121 Rv 3:19