

1 Lent A 2023 SML
MT 4:1-11

At the heart of all temptation is pushing God aside, as secondary, if not actually unnecessary and even annoying, compared to everything else that is on life's plate.

Also at the heart of temptation is "moral posturing." That is, temptation does not invite us directly to do evil. That would be far too blatant. Temptation pretends to show us a better way, as it CLAIMS to speak for what's real. And what's real is what is right there in front of us – bread and power. And by comparison, the things of God fade away, into a secondary world that no one really needs.

So God is the issue.

✓ Is He real or isn't He?

✓ Is He good, or do we invent the good ourselves?

"What must the Savior of the world do or not do?" is the question that the temptations of Our Blessed Lord are about.

"If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." "If you are the Son of God" – we will hear these words again in the mouths of the mocking bystanders at the foot of the cross – "If you are the Son of God, come down from the Cross." (MT 27:40)

“If you are the Son of God . . .” – what a challenge!

Mockery and temptation blend together: Christ is being told to establish His credibility by offering evidence for His claims. Demand for proof is a constantly recurring theme in the life of Our Blessed Lord. Again and again, He is reproached for having failed to prove Himself, for having failed to work that great miracle that will remove all doubt, so as to make it absolutely clear for everyone Who and What He is or is not.

We make the same demand of Our Blessed Lord and His Church throughout the whole of history. “If you exist, God, then you’ll just have to show yourself.” You’ll have to give us a modern-day parting of the Red Sea that will give us the clarity that we deserve. If You, Christ, are really the Son of God, and not just another one of those enlightened individuals who keep appearing in the course of history, then You’ll just have to prove it more clearly than You are doing now. And if the Church is really You, then You’ll have to make that much clearer as well.” Not for anything, Lord, but it’s been three weeks since the earthquake in Turkey and Syria. Why don’t You just part the clouds and come down here and clean all this up?

The proof of divinity that the Devil proposed in the first temptation consisted in changing stones into bread. Is there anything more tragic, is there anything more opposed to belief in the existence of a good God than world hunger? Shouldn't it be the first test of the Redeemer, before the world's eyes and on the world's behalf, to give bread and to end all hunger?

During their wandering through the desert, God fed the people of Israel with manna, bread from heaven, which offered a real glimpse into how things would look when the Messiah came. Wouldn't the Redeemer of the world have to prove Himself by feeding everyone?

As it turned out, Our Blessed Lord did one better, and He fed the multitudes – not just once, but twice in fact, when he multiplied the loaves and the fishes. And Our Blessed Lord has given us the Eucharist, the source and summit of our faith, the Bread of Life, which can never be depleted.

The second temptation is part and parcel to the first. The idea is that after bread has been provided, a spectacle has to be offered as well. Since mere bodily satisfaction is never enough, man demands some excitement, some thrill which replaces religious awe.

The same issue was encountered in the first temptation: God had to submit to experiment. He is “tested” just as products are tested. He must submit to the conditions that we say are necessary if we are to reach certainty.

Arrogance that would make God an object is incapable of finding Him. For it already implies that that we deny God as God, and not that we must listen to God, but that God must listen to us.

As it turned out, Our Blessed Lord did one better. While Our Blessed Lord did not throw himself off the pinnacle of the Temple and descend to the ground, He did descend to the dead, freeing all those who died before He did, but could not enter heaven as the gates were not yet opened.

Finally, the third temptation, where the Devil took Our Blessed Lord up a mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the earth and their splendor and offered Him kingship over the world. And isn't that precisely the mission of the Messiah? Isn't He supposed to be the king of the world who unifies the whole earth in one great kingdom of peace and well-being? Not for anything Lord, but Friday was the first anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. When are You going to climb a mountain and end that war?

Our Blessed Lord says no. Earthly kingdoms remain earthly kingdoms, and anyone who claims to be able to establish the perfect world is duped by Satan and plays the world right into his hands.

As it turned out, just as Jesus did one better in response to the first, the second and now the third temptation. After the Resurrection, Our Blessed Lord ascended the mountain in Galilee where he said, “all authority in heaven and earth (not just earth, but heaven and earth) has been given to Me.” Only someone who has this full authority has real, saving power. Without heaven, earthly power is fragile.

And second, Jesus has this power in virtue of His resurrection, and that presupposes yet another mountain – Calvary, where He hung on the Cross and died.

There was one last proof that Jesus is the Son of God. The angels came, who minister to no one but God alone.

At the end of the day, with three temptations come and gone, what did Jesus actually do?

- ✓ He didn't bring an end to world hunger.
- ✓ He didn't provide a spectacle to top all spectacles
- ✓ and He didn't bring world peace.

What did He bring?

The answer is very simple: God. He brought God. And it's only because of hardness of hearts that some think this is just not enough.