



FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT (3-9-2025)

Luke 4:1-13

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert for forty days, to be tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and when they were over he was hungry. The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.”

Jesus answered him, “It is written, One does not live on bread alone.” Then he took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a single instant.

The devil said to him, “I shall give to you all this power and glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I may give it to whomever I wish. All this will be yours, if you worship me.”

Jesus said to him in reply,

“It is written

You shall worship the Lord, your God, and him alone shall you serve.”

Then he led him to Jerusalem,

made him stand on the parapet of the temple, and said to him,

“If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written:

He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you, and:

With their hands they will support you, lest you dash your foot against a stone.”

Jesus said to him in reply,

“It also says, You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.”

When the devil had finished every temptation,

*he departed from him for a time. **The Gospel of the Lord***

CONTEXT

In the Synoptic Gospels, the scene of the “**temptations of Jesus**” is placed between the baptism and the beginning of the preaching of the Kingdom of God (cf. Mk 1:12-13; Mt 4:1-11; Lk 4:1-13). Luke, however, precedes the preaching scene with a “genealogy” of Jesus (cf. Lk 3:23-38). If at his baptism Jesus' identity was revealed (“***you are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased***” – Lk 3:22), his genealogy shows that Jesus came from a special family (the family

of King David), in which the people of God had placed their hopes of liberation. The figure of Jesus, therefore, generated many expectations. Would He fulfill them? Would his life, his choices, correspond to what God expected of him and what the community of God's People was anxiously awaiting? What paths would He follow? Would he prioritize his personal interests, or God's plan?

The episode of the “temptations of Jesus” answers these questions right away. Is this a real episode, described in a strictly historical way, with a “devil” fighting Jesus for center stage? It is, fundamentally, a catechesis page. It is very likely that Jesus, after his baptism in the River Jordan, withdrew into the desert of Judah and spent a few days meditating on the mission that God wanted to entrust to him. In that time of “retreat”, Jesus faced an inner struggle, with fundamental choices, with the definition of his life project. It is also natural that, later, Jesus spoke to his disciples about what he felt when he had to choose, so that they would realize that, faced with the proposal of the Kingdom of God, they too had to make decisions. This dialogue must have made a deep impression on the disciples. The fact that the account of the “temptations of Jesus” was known from the beginning in early Christian communities shows this.

The episode is set “in the desert”. The desert is, in the Jewish imagination, the place of “testing”, where the Israelites experienced, on several occasions, the temptation of abandoning God and his project of liberation (although it is also the place of encounter with God, the place of discovery of the face of God, the place where the People experienced their fragility and smallness and learned to trust in the goodness and love of God). Will history repeat itself, will Jesus give in to temptation and say “no” to God’s plan, as happened with the Israelites?

The “temptations of Jesus” are not told in the same way by all the Synoptics. Mark limits himself to mentioning that Jesus “was tempted”, without going into details; Matthew and Luke describe Jesus' "temptations" in similar terms, although the second and third "temptations" appear in different orders in the two Gospels. Probably Luke, always concerned with presenting Jerusalem as a central place in the history of salvation, arranged things so that the “theological challenge” between Jesus and the devil would have its epilogue in Jerusalem.

MESSAGE

Luke tells us that after his baptism in the Jordan River, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness (v. 1). The “forty days” that Jesus spent in this place of “testing” (v. 2) must be related to the “forty years” that the Hebrews spent in the desert, after being freed from Egypt, and where they had to make choices between God and evil, between freedom and slavery. It is important to point out that Jesus is led by the Spirit of God, this Spirit that descended upon Him at the moment He was baptized: it will be the same Spirit that will sustain Him throughout His mission and that will give Him the strength to make the right choices, in line with God's plan.

The time he spent in the desert, reflecting on the mission that awaited him, was for Jesus a time of testing, of decisions, perhaps of purifying the reasons that moved him. The figure of the

“devil” embodies, in this context of choices, the wrong paths that are also available to Jesus. The scene is set around a dialogue in which Jesus and the “devil” debate the various possibilities that present themselves, in a dialectical struggle based on quotations from the sacred scriptures.

In the first moment of this dialogue, Jesus is challenged to choose material goods, to use his divine condition to satisfy his most basic needs: “*if you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread*” (v. 3). To this “temptation”, Jesus responds that “*man does not live by bread alone*” and that the path to the Father does not pass through the selfish accumulation of goods (v. 4). Jesus' response quotes Deuteronomy 8:3, suggesting that his food—his priority, his fundamental interest—is the Word of the Father, the fulfillment of the Father's will.

In a second moment of this dialogue, Jesus is invited to choose a path of power, of dominion, of arrogance, in the style of the great ones of the earth (v. 5-7). However, Jesus is fully aware that the appetite for power is something diabolical, which absolutely contradicts God's schemes. Quoting Dt 6.13, Jesus affirms that, in his plan of life, the only absolute is God; the power that corrupts and enslaves will never be, for Him, a choice to be taken into account (v. 8).

The third moment of this dialogue is placed by Luke on the “pinnacle of the temple” in Jerusalem, in the southwest corner of the building, where those attending the sanctuary could enjoy a magnificent view over the Kidron Valley (v. 9). The challenge posed to Jesus, through the citation of Ps 91:11-12, is to use his closeness to God to provoke, on God's part, a display of power that shows all of Jerusalem the dimension of Jesus (vv. 10-11). It would be a matter of “forcing” God into a spectacular gesture that would lead the crowds to admire and acclaim Jesus. Jesus responds to this proposal by quoting Dt 6.16, which commands “not to tempt” the Lord God (verse 12): here, “tempt” means “not to use God's gifts or God's goodness for a selfish and self-interested end.” Jesus refuses to perform “miracles” to legitimize his person or his power among the crowds.

Is the question of options definitively resolved on Jesus' part? Did Jesus definitively free himself from these “temptations” that suggested a path different from the path the Father invited him to take? Lucas doesn't think so. Therefore, he adds that the devil “*withdrew from the presence of Jesus until a certain time*” (v. 13). Jesus will have to renew, at every step, his choice for the Father's project.

It is clear, however, which path Jesus proposed to follow from the beginning. He won the fight against evil. He does not want to live to accumulate wealth, dominate people, or display the greatness of God for his own benefit. Jesus proposes to serve God's plan, without deviating one iota from the Father's will.

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

* In these days, we begin to walk the Lenten path. It is the path that leads us to Easter, to resurrection, to new life. Along this path we will be invited to analyze, with lucidity and a sense of responsibility, our options, our priorities, our values, the meaning of our life... This time could

be a time of conversion, of realignment, of renewal, of change; It could be an opportunity to get closer to God and the proposals He makes to us. The Word of God that we will hear every Sunday will help us to realize the meaninglessness of some of our choices and to detect some of the mistakes in which we navigate. Do we accept the challenge of walking this path? This Sunday's Gospel mentions some of the "temptations" that Jesus had to face and overcome. Are we willing, for our part, to identify the "temptations" that enslave us and prevent us from living a more dignified, more human life, fuller of meaning and hope? What are the "temptations" that most frequently distance us from Jesus' lifestyle and project?

*One of the "temptations" that Jesus had to fight was that of material goods. It is a "temptation" that we know well, as we must always deal with it. Appealing to our appetite for comfort, well-being, security, it invites us to accumulate things, to prioritize money, to make material goods the great objective of our lives. It is, however, a "temptation" that can completely distort the meaning of our existence: it creates dependence, makes us slaves to material goods, makes us chase after ephemeral things; it closes us off to sharing, solidarity, fraternity; it increases indifference towards the needs of our brothers; encourages us to bet on mechanisms of exploitation and profit... What place and role do material goods assume in our lives? Is our dealing with material goods healthy and balanced?

*Another of the "temptations" that Jesus had to face was that of power, glory, and human triumphs. Jesus considered that the desire to subjugate others, to hold unlimited authority, to dominate the world, is something diabolical, which can make man lose his great reference – God. It is at the base of the pride and self-sufficiency that locks man in his personal ghetto; leads man to want to free himself from God's "control" and to turn his back on God; develops in man "tics" of authoritarianism, intolerance, and arrogance that cause irreparable wounds in the world; it encourages the abuse of the weakest, the smallest, those who have no say or voice; promotes mechanisms of slavery, exploitation and social tension; encourages wars, violence, imperialism; builds walls of enmity that separate people and prevent them from living in harmony... Is this "temptation" a problem for us? How do we treat those with whom we share life's path: with arrogance and haughtiness, or with humility, respect and love?

*The third of the "temptations" that crossed Jesus' path was to use God to obtain recognition, applause, appreciation, and consideration from men. It is not as unusual a "temptation" as it may seem at first glance. This "temptation" can make us think about using faith to obtain personal benefits, to build a successful "career", to gain reputation, renown or prestige; can make us think about the use of religion to obtain privileges, titles or honors; it can make us think about the "demands" we make of God so that He grants us the favors to which we believe we are entitled... And it can, on the other hand, make us think about the concessions that some people are willing to make, sometimes at the cost of their own dignity, to obtain a few minutes of fame and notoriety... Are recognition, fame, applause, privileges, goods for which it is worth paying any price?

*We are human and fragile. We live immersed in a reality of sin, which conditions us and drags us towards questionable choices. Is it possible to overcome these “temptations” that continually appear on our path in life? Jesus overcame them. He never accepted that his life would be led by mistakes and easy ways. He chose, time and time again, not to stray from the Father's plan. We can say that we do not have the same strength as Jesus. It may be true. But He goes before us, showing us the way and telling us that it is possible to say “no”, over and over again, to proposals that lead us down paths where there is no true life. Are we willing to try, repeatedly, without excuses and without justifications, to follow the example of Jesus?