

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT



GOSPEL: SAINT MATTHEW 4:1–11

Temptation

17.1 First Point

Today's Gospel, which informs us that Jesus Christ went off into the desert,¹ does not say that he did this to withdraw from human company or to pray but to be tempted. This helps us understand that the first step we must take when we wish to give ourselves to God is to leave the world to prepare ourselves to fight this world and all the enemies of our salvation.

In seclusion from the world, says Saint Ambrose, we ought to 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 must prepare themselves for temptation.² 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 to be devoted 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 thus to draw from it all the benefit that God wishes it to accomplish in you.

17.2 Second Point

What ought to induce a soul truly given to God to be always ready to meet temptation is what Job says: human life is a temptation or, according to the Vulgate, a constant warfare.³ From this we may conclude that if God wishes a soul to be tempted in this world, it is because there is a need to struggle constantly against the demon and our 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, was tempted, no one can hope to cross the stormy sea of this life without being exercised by temptation.

Have you been expecting to battle constantly with the demon and against you? Since you left the world, have you been as constantly on your guard against you as you must be? Do you have what you need to resist the demon and not to surrender 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 we are not victorious in any way and that we are allowing ourselves to be easily conquered by our 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.⁴ This ought to convince you fully of the necessity of trials of this sort, for 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, because he gives you the opportunity to fight and to practice virtue energetically and in this way to gain strength by it. Little by little, we acquire sublime virtue when we remain constant, unshaken, and inflexible in its practice in spite of the violent temptations that attack us.

So, consider it a great misfortune when you are not tempted. This is a sign of reprobation and of God's abandonment, for God exercises those he loves⁵ and is pleased when he sees them tempted, as was the case with Job and Tobias, two of his most faithful servants.

1. Mt 4:1

3. Jb 7:1

5. Rv 3:19

2. Sir 2:1

4. Tb 12:13

