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THE FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT: JESUS IS TEMPTED IN THE DESERT

One commentator on the Scriptures suggested that this experience of Jesus being tempted would not have been included in the accounts of his life and ministry unless Jesus revealed this to some of his followers. He is portrayed as vulnerable to the deceits of Satan. Why would Jesus go into the desert for a forty day retreat after his baptism? It is the same reason why people go on retreat: to refocus on who they are, where they are going and how to get there. One's perspective about life gets blurred by all the noise and hyperactivity of life. Jesus needed time to understand the revelation of his identity given by the voices of his Father at his baptism: "You are my beloved Son, my favor rests on you."

Matthew 4:1-11

At that time Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights and afterwards was hungry. The tempter approached and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become loaves of bread." He said in reply, "It is written:

One does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes forth from the mouth of God." Then the devil took him to the holy city and made him stand on the parapet of the temple and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written: He will command his angels concerning you and with their hands they will support you lest you dash your foot against a stone." Jesus answered him, "Again it is written, you shall not put the Lord, your God to the test." Then the devil took him up to a very high mountain and he showed him all the kingdoms of the world in their magnificence and he said to him, "All these I shall give to you if you will prostrate yourself and worship me." At this, Jesus said to him, "Get away Satan! It is written: The Lord, your God, shall you worship and him alone shall you serve." Then the devil left him, and behold angels came and ministered to him.

Reflection from the Preface of the Mass:

His fast of forty days makes this a holy season of self-denial. By rejecting the devil's temptations he has taught us to rid ourselves of the hidden corruption of evil, and so to share his paschal meal in purity of heart, until we come to its fulfillment in the promised land of heaven.

Suggestions for Reflection

1. Jesus was tempted as we are. Temptations are not bad in themselves but it is what we do with them that can help us turn to God or away from God. Do we see temptations as ways to turn to God rather than rely on our own resources?
2. The temptations of Jesus seem different from the ways we are tempted or is there a similarity? Underneath the different temptations of Jesus, there is the invitation of Satan that he deny his identity as the Son of God. Are not our temptations an invitation to deny the kind of person we want to be and, instead, turn to unhealthy ways to satisfy ourselves?
3. By resisting the temptations, Jesus chose to depend on his Father to satisfy his deepest hunger, to relate with others in an ordinary way and by not rely on reputation, power and possessions. How do we satisfy our deepest hungers? Do we depend on prestige and power to make ourselves acceptable to others?
4. Are we going to use the forty days of Lent as a retreat—making time to be more reflective and prayer?

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