

## First Sunday in Lent: Temptations in General

Then Jesus was led by the spirit into the desert, to be tempted by the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterwards He was hungry. And the tempter coming said to Him: If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. Who answered and said: **It is written, not in bread alone doth man live, but in every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God.** Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, and set Him upon the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him: If Thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down, for it is written: That He hath given His angels charge over Thee, and in their hands shall they bear Thee up, lest, perhaps, Thou dash Thy foot against a stone. Jesus said to him: **It is written again: Thou shalt not tempt the Lord Thy God.** Again the devil took Him up into a very high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, and said to Him: All these will I give Thee, if, falling down, Thou wilt adore me. Then Jesus saith to him: **Begone, Satan; for it is written, The Lord thy God shalt thou adore, and Him only shalt thou serve.** Then the devil left Him; and behold angels came and ministered to Him.

*The Gospel according to St Matthew, IV:1-11.*

### *Summary of the Morrow's Meditation*

We shall see tomorrow in our meditation: first, that temptation, far from being an evil, may be turned to great advantage; second, on what conditions is the temptation thus changed into good. We will then make the resolution: first, to prevent temptations as much as possible by watchfulness over ourselves and union with God; second, promptly to turn away from the temptation as soon as we perceive it, and not allow it to trouble us. Our spiritual nosegay shall be the words of the apostle St James: "*Blessed is the man that endureth temptation*" (James 1:12).

### *Meditation for the Morning*

Let us adore Jesus Christ tempted in the desert by the devil. It was, indeed, by far the greatest humiliation that a God could suffer, but He suffered it, because He knew that His example would encourage us in the midst of our trials and would teach us that the more a soul is dear to God, the more it ought to be proved by temptation (Tob. XII:13). Let us thank Him for such great goodness.

### TEMPTATION, FAR FROM BEING AN EVIL, MAY BE TURNED TO OUR GREAT ADVANTAGE

No moral evil is possible excepting insofar as the will consents to it; as long as the door of the will is closed, the devil and the imagination may make a noise around the heart, but they cannot soil its purity. This is why Jesus Christ and all the saints have been subjected to the trials of temptation, without their trial having occasioned the least injury to their holiness. This is why to be cast down in temptation is unreasonable; it is either occasioned by self-love being annoyed at seeing itself so miserable, or else a want of confidence in God, who never fails anyone who calls upon Him, or else it is the cowardice of a soul which imagines that it

stands alone with its weakness, and without the help of God. Far from temptation being an evil, it may, on the contrary, be turned to our great advantage. For, first, it gives us an opportunity of glorifying God, since by generously resisting it we prove our fidelity to Him, we combat His enemies, and we triumph; second, it exercises us in humility, by revealing the evil basis which exists in us; in the spirit of prayer, by making us feel the need of having recourse to God; in vigilance, by warning us to mistrust our own strength and to fly from occasions of evil; in divine love, by its causing to shine forth the goodness of God, who is willing to lower His grace, to lower even Himself by communion to so depraved a level as ours; it prevents laxity, it awakens fervour, it gives to virtue a firmer and more solid character (II Cor. XII:9); it teaches us to know ourselves (Sirach XXXIV:9). It gives the soul an opportunity to acquire more graces in this world, and more glory in the next world in proportion to the merits with which it enriches it, and renders it more worthy of God, like the saints of whom it is written, "*God hath tried them and found them worthy of Himself*" (Wis. III:5). This is why God said to the people of Israel: "*I would not destroy them from your face, that you may have enemies*" (Judges II:3), and Pope Leo also said in the same sense: "*It is well for the soul to be afraid of falling, and to have a battle constantly to wage*" (Serm. III). The faithful soul derives from temptation to evil the same fruit as from inspiration to good. It is an opportunity for it to tend towards perfection in the contrary virtue, with all the good-will of which it is capable. In temptations of the senses, it raises itself to the infinite glory of God, placed so high above all low and sensual views; in mental temptations it takes refuge in its nothingness; in temptations to pleasure it loves to embrace the cross. Is it thus that we profit by temptation?

#### ON WHAT CONDITIONS TEMPTATIONS ARE CHANGED INTO GOOD

There are certain conditions required before, during, and after temptation. First, before temptation we must avoid all that exposes us to it or inclines us to evil, for example, dangerous society and books; looks which are kept too little in check; manners which are too free; the delights of an effeminate and sensual life. He who loves danger shall perish in it; he who counts upon his own strength shall be confounded. Mistrust is the mother of safety, and to expose one's self voluntarily to danger is to tempt God and to render ourselves unworthy of His help. On the other side, we must not be afraid of temptation, because by fearing it we give birth to it; the best is not to think of it and to be given up entirely to what we have to do. Second, during temptation we must not amuse ourselves with it, under the pretext that it is slight, otherwise it will take the upper hand; but we must turn away promptly, firmly, and quietly from it; turn our back upon it with contempt, without even deigning to look at it; and if it produce some impressions upon us, we must disown them peacefully, applying ourselves wholly to present actions. Whoever fights with it risks soiling himself; and he who repels it with excessive efforts loses peace of heart, recollection of the mind, and the unction of piety. If we cannot succeed by these means, we must have recourse humbly to God, saying to Him: "O my Lord, how great is my misery; how wrong I should be still to cherish self-love, and how good Thou art to love a sinner such as I am! O Jesus! O Mary! O all ye angels and saints, bless the Lord who deigns to abase His love down to my nothingness". Third, after the temptation we must forget it; reflection will bring it back to life. It is better to encourage ourselves peaceably to the repairing of the past wrong-doing, if any such has existed, by performing very perfectly the action in which we are engaged; by uniting ourselves to God, and

casting ourselves into His arms with confidence and love, saying to Him as did the prodigal: “**Father I have sinned against heaven and before Thee**” (Luke xv:18), or like the publican: “*O God, have mercy on me, a sinner*” (Luke xviii:13). Let us examine ourselves as to whether we have observed these rules, before, during, and after temptation.

*Resolutions and spiritual nosegay as above.*