

We are all going to be tempted in one way or another. There's simply no way to avoid it. Jesus tells us in Luke chapter 17 that "temptations to sin are sure to come." You could even translate that as "it is impossible for temptations to sin not to come." And these temptations often come to us through Satan, who is seeking to destroy us. Peter says in 1 Peter 5: "Be sober minded, be watchful. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." So the question, Christians, is not: will we be tempted? That's inevitable. But rather, the question is: what will we do when we are tempted? How will we react in that moment?

And that is a question that we need to think about very carefully, very seriously, because we need to be ready whenever temptation comes. And we are not going to be ready by being tough or confident about it, as if the only thing I need to say is: "I can't be tempted. I'll be just fine. I won't be tempted. I can stand firm. I've done it before, and I can do it again." Because if we think that way, Christians, we are putting ourselves into the greatest danger. We simply won't be ready when the temptation comes. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10: "Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall." Because if we think temptation is something that we can just easily resist, that it's no big deal at all, then we are not dealing with temptation as it actually is. We are thinking of temptation as if it was something general, something broad, something indistinct, as if all temptation was the same. It's not dealing with reality. It's basically winning arguments in the shower. Because temptation is not always the same thing, Christians. Temptation is always something specific, a specific question in a specific moment. Temptation is demanding. Temptation is immediate. Temptation hurries you to make a decision, to do something right now and not later. What are you going to do in this moment? What are you going to do in this specific situation when the pressure is on? That is the danger of temptation.

Jesus in our Gospel reading for today is being tempted by Satan in a very specific circumstance, in a very specific way. Because he's been in the wilderness now for forty days and forty nights fasting. To say that he is hungry is putting it pretty mildly, actually. Because we know how difficult it is for us to fast even for one day. Skipping just one meal is often very difficult for us. But Jesus has been without food for well over a month. And in this situation, in the midst of Jesus' great hunger, the devil comes to tempt him. He says in verse 3: "If you are the son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." It's all you need to do, Jesus. Just make some bread right now. Tell these stones to become bread. You can do it! Because you certainly need something to eat.

But we might ask, well, where's the temptation here? Because bread is not evil. And Jesus can certainly do this. He is God, after all, and nothing is too hard for God. Bread is something good. Why does Jesus rebuke Satan for telling him to do this? Because behind Satan's words, Christians, is a very sinister thing. It's not so much what Satan says as what he implies by saying it. Satan is tempting Jesus to think that his Father is not going to care for him, that his Father won't provide for him. It's been forty days, Jesus! Can't you see the writing on the wall? Nobody is coming to help you. Your Father is not going to take care of you. If you want something to eat, you've got to take matters into your own hands. Pull yourself up, command this stone to become bread, and deal with the problem yourself. That's the only way. That's the temptation that Jesus was facing.

But what would we do in that situation, Christians? Would we trust God to provide for us when we have nothing? If we haven't had food for forty days, would we still trust that God was going

to give us some? If we haven't had food for a single day, will we still think that God would give us what we need, that he would give us our daily bread? Would you still trust God to care for you even if you didn't know how he was going to do it or when he was going to do it? Because it's easy to trust God when there's food on the table. But when we have nothing, will we still trust him? Because the temptation is not if God can provide. We know that he can. But rather will he provide for us right now? That's the danger of temptation.

But the devil's not done. He takes Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem and sets him up on the very highest point. And he tells him to throw himself down. Just jump off, Jesus, because your Father's going to take care of you. Satan says in verse 6 of our reading: "If you are the son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'" There's no danger. Your Father's going to take care of you. Didn't he say that in Psalm 91 which I've just quoted to you? I could quote so many other passages from the Bible that say the same thing. So just jump! There's nothing to be afraid of. Nothing to worry about. God will take care of you.

Well, what's the temptation? Jesus rebukes him for this too. Isn't the Bible clear? Doesn't it say that God will protect you? Doesn't it say that God will lift you up lest you strike your foot against a stone? What's the problem here? The problem is that Satan is deliberately abusing these Scriptures. He's deliberately misquoting them so as to miss the point of what God is trying to say. The point is not if God can help us. He will help us. The Bible says that clearly. But rather, the question is: will God help us right now? Because it's one thing to say that God can, but is he going to help us in this specific situation? Will God deliver us from our troubles in this moment? Will God save us from this particular danger, whatever it may be? The devil wanted Jesus to put that to the test, to see if God would help him even as he plummeted from the top of the temple. Because it's easy to think that God will help us when nothing's happening. But will we still trust him when we are under fire? That's the danger of temptation.

The devil tries one more thing. Satan takes Jesus up to the top of a very high mountain, and he shows to Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. Everything that the world has to offer, all of its power and its majesty. And he gives him a very simple offer, verse 9: "All these I will give you if you will fall down and worship me." So much for so little! Just do this one little thing, and you get so much in return. Who could refuse an offer like that? To have all the power of the world. We can probably imagine that we would use that power for great good. But of course, we probably want to say: well, I would refuse! I can see through the devil's tricks. I know what he's up to. I wouldn't give in, even if he were to offer me all the world in return. But in reality, Christians, Satan doesn't have to offer us the world. He often gets us for far less. Judas, after all, betrayed Jesus for what amounted to be about three hundred dollars. Three hundred dollars! And he turned his master over to death. We spend that much in one trip to the grocery store. Because it's always the specific temptation, Christians, that's the hardest to resist. Will we stand firm when the pressure is on in this situation? Will we resist in this moment? Will our plans to change our ways fall through because we don't want to deal with it right now? Will our resolutions fall apart because they're just too much work? Will we do what we said we weren't going to do anymore because we weren't ready for the battle when it came? That is the real danger of temptation.

So what are we supposed to do? Where can we turn to find help in temptation's hour? Turn to Christ, who was tempted like us in every way. Because Jesus prepared himself for those moments of temptation. Jesus fought against them in that specific situation, fighting them back and driving them away with the Scriptures. Jesus resisted the devil and strengthened himself through prayer. Because Jesus knows what it means to be tempted. Hebrews 2 says: "For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted." Christ will help us fight temptation, real temptation, the temptation that demands an answer, the temptation in the moment. He will prepare us for the fight. Without him, we have nothing, but in him, we are able to endure it and to overcome. As Paul says again in 1 Corinthians 10: "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it." That way of escape, Christians, is found in Jesus. There is victory over every temptation through Jesus Christ our Lord.

And Jesus also shows us how to resist temptation. If we want to know how to do it, how to fight against it, we simply have to do what he did. First of all by being in the Word of God. Know what the Word says, Christians. Know what God has promised to you. Because Jesus used that same Word to drive away every temptation of the devil. The Word of God is living and active, a powerful, two-edged sword in our hands. And when we hold on to it and know how to use it, the devil will not be able to withstand us.

Second, be in prayer. Because Jesus wasn't sitting around for forty days doing nothing in the wilderness. He was praying constantly, to be prepared for the fight. So call on God, Christians. Pray at all times, because prayer prepares us for the battle. Prayer is our training for the day of temptation.

Third, anticipate. Anticipate as best you can what is coming. Don't put yourself into danger without any good reason to do so. Because Jesus did not go looking for the devil in the wilderness. The devil came looking for him. And if we know that doing something or going somewhere is going to tempt us, then don't do it! Don't put yourself into that danger without a good reason.

And lastly, when the temptation comes, get away from it if you can. Sticking around and dwelling on it is only going to make it worse. But even if you can't get away--and we can't always get away--call on God in that moment. Call out to Christ because he will help you right then and there. He will not fail to answer you.

And when we do all of these things, Christians, we will be ready for the battle whenever and wherever it may come. Because in Christ alone is our victory. He is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

So when temptation comes--and it will come--don't rely on yourself. Don't think that there is no danger, that you'll just be able to deal with it on your own. But rather, call on Jesus Christ in that moment, and you will find the way of escape in him.

Let us pray. O Lord of Hosts, our fortress in the hour of temptation, give us the strength to resist the tricks of that ancient serpent, the devil. Send your holy angels to watch over us so that we

know that those who are with us are more than those who are against us. Cover us with your mighty hand so that we would not turn aside to evil, and show us the way to stand firm through Jesus Christ, your Son. In his name we pray. Amen.