Lent 1 (2026)

When I was in the third grade, I would walk up the road to see my grandmother who was in what was then called a rest home. The red brick building was set back in amongst live oak trees.

One of my memories was of a middle-aged man wearing a white linen suit walking the grounds talking to himself.

At first, I was a little apprehensive and stayed clear of him, but eventually I figured out he was okay. Once he even bought one of my candy bars I was selling for our school.

Later, someone explained to me that he had a type of mental illness which caused him to hear voices.

As I begin, I want to suggest that you don't have to have a mentally illness to hear voices. They are all around all of us. We all hear them.

There are good ones entering our minds from above telling us to walk as children of the light . . . to read our Bibles, to be faithful in worship on the Lord's day, to pray and give for the spread of the kingdom, to think good thoughts and banish bad ones, to be patient and kind, and to stay away from practices and attitudes contrary to God's revealed will in the scriptures. These come from the Holy Spirit.

But there are other voices which urge us to go in quite the opposite direction. Some of these arise from within, while others come blaring at us from the world of media and advertising.

Instead of telling us to be true to the God who loved and imagined us into being, they whisper, "Be true yourself."

They say, "Find happiness in getting and spending."

They say, "If it feels, good, do it!"

They say, “Take care of No.1. Reward yourself.”

They say, “Compromise to get ahead.”

Some of these voices may even point us to scripture to justify some unlawful longing or desire. The text is wrenched out of its natural context and twisted, yet on the surface it appears to say what we want it to say.

At times, the things these voices are urging may not be overtly wicked. They may simply be a waste of time . . . something that gets in the way of a higher calling.

In your own life you may be able to think of some temptations of both the first and second order.

The first – those that are out-and-out evil – would certainly include murder, stealing and

getting too friendly with someone else's wife or husband.

But what about temptations of the second order, things that get in the way of better things.

Some examples of these might include: spending money on things you don't really need; occupying an inordinate amount of time surfing the internet instead of doing something more productive like digging in your garden, helping a neighbor, checking on a shut-in or spending meaningful time with your family.

The bottom line: temptation comes in all shapes and sizes and is common to all. No one is exempt.

Benjamin Franklin is credited with the maxim, **"In this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes."** To these two, we might add a third, **temptation.**

Turning now to this morning's Gospel, you might have been perplexed with something stated in its opening line: **"Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil."**

Taken at face values, it sounds as if God is the doer of the action, the one who is leading Jesus into temptation.

What are we to make of this opening line?

Is it God's purpose to trip people up . . . to put them in situations where they are likely to stumble and fall?

Does God relish people's destruction?

The answer is no. We learn as much in James 1:13 where we read: **"God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man."**

How then can we reconcile these two seemingly contradictory statements – the one from today's Gospel saying Jesus was led up by the Spirit [of God] and the one from James saying God tempts no one?

The answer, according to Bible commenter William Barclay, lies in the overlapping meaning of 'tempt'. It may mean **entice to do wrong**, but it can also mean **to test**.

The Spirit leading Jesus into the desert seems to have been of the second sort. It was to 'test' or prove Him.

The same remains true today. God allows His human creatures to experience various tests.

These tests are designed not break a man but to make him . . . to strengthen and equip him for greater service.

The trials of life – including the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil – cause a person to rely more fully on God . . . to put aside his own vibrato and to draw on a power outside himself.

This thought is closely related to the petition in the Lord's Prayer: **"Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."**

Here we ask not to be taken out of the world or to be given a pain-free passage, but rather that our Heavenly Father will walk beside us and guide us safely through the trial and dangers of this world . . . to be our rod and staff.

But back to my original point, there are voices all around us beckoning us to go this way or that.

Two are central in the episode in the life of our Lord that we have before us this morning.

The first came just before we picked up reading. Jesus had gone through the waters of baptism. Coming up out of the water, He had heard a voice from heaven say, **"This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."**

Then as we move into this morning's Gospel, we find him hearing a very different voice. It is that of the Tempter saying with a sneer:

"*If you really are the Son of God*, command these stones to be made bread."

What is Satan doing?

He is trying to get Jesus to doubt His messianic calling, trying to get Him off course.

And, as we continue through the passage, we find him also trying to persuade Jesus to go about his Messianic mission using the methods

of the world rather that the methods of God. Namely by:

--Gaining the allegiance of men by supplying them with bread . . . satisfying their physical hunger at the expense of their spiritual.

--Through shock and awe . . . by casting Himself down from the highest point of the Temple and having angels carry Him to safety.

--By compromising with evil . . . selling His soul to the devil in order to bring about some good.

One thing about which we can be very sure is that the Great Accuser, the one who tried to trip up the Divine-Human Son of God, is still out there plying his trade. He wants to bring believers, especially it seems high-profile ones, down and destroy their witness.

And in recent days, he seems to be having remarkable success in this endeavor. Hardly a day goes by without a new scandalous revelation about a bishop or Christian leader.

Of course, it is not just high-profile people who must stay on guard. It's all of us.

And this brings me to my concluding point or application. How do we respond when we find voices coming from the lower region entering our heads or being hurled at us from external sources? ///

First, we should not think that because we are being tempted we are not a true Christians. Jesus, after all, was tempted, as were the saints down through history.

"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you," we are told in 1 Peter 4:12.

That thought – that because you are being tested you are not a child a God – is a lie from the devil of hell. If you ever find that thought arising in your mind, say loudly and in the Lord's name: **Get thee hence, Satan.**

Second, in today's Gospel we find the chief tool that needs to be used in spiritual warfare. Three times Jesus was tempted, and three times He responded with **"It is written."**

The chief weapon at the Christian's disposal is the scriptures.

We, therefore, need to know them so that we can use them. The psalmist sets us on the right path when he says: **"Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (119:11).**

In closing:

Temptation is part of our daily experience. There are indeed voices all around us, many of which are telling us to go in the wrong direction.

But we have cause for confidence.

The One who overcame the tempter's power in the wilderness was victorious over sin and evil on the cross and remains near at hand, strong and ready to help.

Stay close to Him, seek the assistance of the Holy Spirit, know your Bible, stay on your guard, and go forth into the battle of life in His strength.

Victory can be yours. /// He cares for you.