

✠ LUKE 4:1-13 ✠

In Nomine Iesu

First, St. Luke records for us the baptism of Jesus and the accompanying signs from on high, the descending of the Spirit in the form of a dove and the voice of the Father, which mark Jesus as the Son of God. Second, St. Luke takes us through the genealogy of Jesus, ending it with these words, “[He was] the son of Adam, the son of God.” Satan would not have been ignorant of these things. Satan would have known of the witness this Jesus of Nazareth received having come up out of the waters of baptism, and he would be able to trace Jesus’ lineage back to Adam. So Satan comes to Jesus and says, “If you are the Son of God...”

That is, “I’ve heard it said, and I’ve seen it demonstrated that you are the Son of God, but I do not believe it. For if you are the Son of God, then you bear His name, and you are God. But I have been in the presence of God, and He is nothing like you. You are a man. So, then, prove yourself to be the Son of God, change these stones into bread to satisfy your hunger.” Thus the Tempter tempted Jesus with the same temptation with which he conquered Adam. “Did God really say you are the Son of God? Did God really say you are not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil? Prove it.” Adam, in his pride, failed to prove it because he ate of the Tree, thus he called God a liar and Satan the teller of truths. As it is written, “they exchanged the truth of God for a lie” (Rom. 1:25). Adam’s sin turned everything on its head. He destroyed life and caused the fall of mankind into the depths of sin and shame.

Jesus, on the other hand, refused to prove that He is the Son of God on Satan’s terms. “No,” our Lord says, “for it is written that man shall not live by bread alone.” Not only does Jesus not succumb to the temptation of hunger, the weakest of the temptations, but also He did not succumb to the temptation of pride, thereby giving Satan the satisfaction of telling Jesus what to do. Furthermore, Jesus likened Himself to man, not to God. He said, “Man shall not live by bread alone.” That is, “Moses survived forty days on top of Mt. Sinai and neither ate nor drank anything, but was sustained by the power of the Most High God. So, too, will I depend not upon the things of creation, but upon my Father’s will and desire.”

Thus with this first response Jesus really responds to all temptations that He would face and that you face; “not my will, but my Father’s will.”

Yet Satan would not leave it at that. He took and showed Jesus his reign over the earth, his kingdom of the earth. “Bow down to me and I will give you authority over all my kingdom.” But Jesus had already answered this temptation: “I will bow only to my Father’s will. Him alone shall I worship and serve.” Had Jesus succumbed to this temptation He would have forfeited the greater gift of His Father. “My Son, glorify me by fulfilling my will and I will give you all authority not only over the kingdoms of the earth, but all authority in heaven and on earth.” The gifts of God are always better than the temptations of Satan.

So Satan took Jesus up to the highest point of the temple and bid Him to throw Himself down, thereby proving that He is the Son of God. Now we see the true nature of things. It is not merely that the temptations of the evil one are contrary to God’s will and desire, but they

are nonsensical, turning everything upside down. The words of God are truth and pure, making sense of everything and revealing all mysteries. The words of Satan, the world, and our sinful nature are lies. As our Lord said, "When he lies, he speaks his native tongue, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (Jn 8:44). His words are not true. They are deception. There is no truth in them. It is impossible to take the good out of the lies because there is no good in them. Finding the good in the things of Satan and man is like saying that we are going to find dry ground at the bottom of the sea: it won't happen, it can't happen, for only God is good.

When exposed by the light of the Word of God, the lies of Satan are shown for what they are: nonsensical babble. How does throwing Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple prove that He is the Son of God? Satan sweetens the pot by quoting Scripture: "He will command His angels concerning you, to guard you [and] on their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone." But the temptation has not really changed these three times. Each time Satan has desired Jesus to do his bidding. The first was to change stone into bread; the second was to worship Satan; and the third was for Jesus to throw Himself down from the top of the temple. If Jesus had done any of these things He would have been listening to Satan and not to His Father. That is the temptation. That is the fall into wickedness and sin: to call the things of God evil and the words of God lies, and to call the things of Satan good and his words truth.

If Jesus had changed the stone into bread Satan would have said, "Big deal, Moses brought water out of a rock and he was not the Son of God. This proves nothing." If Jesus had bowed before Satan, Satan would have said, "You cannot be the Son of God, for you, like Adam before you, are mine." If Jesus had thrown Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple, Satan would have said, "This proves nothing but that you have done my bidding, and God has delivered you into my hands." So Jesus did nothing. He neither negated Satan's ploys nor affirmed His own divinity, but He simply said, "It is not my will, but my Father's will that I do, and you are not my Father."

Dear Christians, you have been baptized; you have had a bull's-eye in the shape of a cross, painted with water and the Word upon your forehead and upon your heart. You have been singled out as one belonging to God. You are in the wilderness of sin and shame, and you will be tempted.

You will have Satan saying to you, "If you are a child of God, then why are you so poor and miserable? Why do you hunger for food and beg for money? Surely the sons and daughters of God should be well taken care of and prosper greatly." We succumb to the temptation when we deny our neighbor and get what we can for ourselves, quoting Satan's old adage, "First come first serve." We scramble to get what is ours, what we think we deserve, all the while neglecting the needs of the widows and orphans. We attain to mass quantities of worldly goods, yet neglect the much more needed discipline of spiritual living by seeking to protect and improve our neighbor's income and possessions.

But Satan attacks on that front as well, saying, "Your church is dwindling and your pews are vacant. You must not be of God." And we succumb to the temptation when we let numbers guide our preaching; when we allow false doctrine disguised in nice words and loving gestures to cloud our eyes so that we no longer see Jesus but only the "bigger picture" of a packed house. When this temptation wins out we end up gaining the world, but forfeiting our souls and the souls of our children.

Satan will say to you, “Bow down before me and I will make you great. Deny God’s Word. Allow open communion, homosexual bishops, women pastors, and evolution, and I will make sure your pews are full and your offering plates overflowing. Worship me in the form of your synod, in the form of your church, in the form of your voter’s meetings, worship me in the form of being loving instead of truthful, kind instead of honest, tolerant instead of faithful, and open-minded instead of obedient to God’s Word and will.” And we succumb to the temptation when we do not live in the purity of the Word of God but instead let the voice of the times dictate to us what God really said, if He said anything at all. We, like Adam before us, call the things of God a lie and the things of Satan truth.

But it does not stop there. Satan is not satisfied with simply ruining your church and destroying your neighbor, he wants you. He is after you. And he will do whatever it takes to try and get to you. He will tempt you by using Scripture against you, saying, “If you are a child of God, then you must be holy; throw yourself into the midst of sin and shame and He will be gracious to you and forgive you. For it is written, “God is a gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love” (Ex. 34:6). It’s okay to lust after your neighbor’s wife, to lie to your teacher about your homework, to speak evil behind your parent’s backs, to secretly view pornography on the Internet, or to bend the truth to make yourself look better. God will forgive you, so do what you must to make yourself look good, after all, if people like you then you have a better chance of being an effective Christian, don’t you? Isn’t it better to be liked and to get along than it is to be right and doctrinally sound?”

In the end, there is only one temptation: to worship Satan instead of God. And even here he moves to steer you away from the path of righteousness by saying, “Oh, no, you could worship self too; you could worship possessions, spouses, children, anything, not just Satan, so you better guard against all of that too, lest you succumb to many of the other false gods.” Thus Satan divides your defenses and conquers. But our Lord says otherwise: either you are of God or you are of Satan (John 8:44). There is no middle ground; there is no sitting on the fence.

So we find in our lives, in every minute of our lives, that Satan goes about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet 5:8). But thanks be to God that there is One whom he cannot devour: our Lord Jesus Christ. He alone succeeded in overcoming temptation, and He alone succeeds in overcoming temptation now. As it is written, “Greater is He who is in me than he who is in the world” (1 Jn 4:4). Your temptations are real and deadly, yet our Lord is greater than they and will deliver you from them, as it is written, “He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again” (2 Cor. 1:10), and also it is written, “[Christ] gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father” (Gal. 1:4).

Thus it is by Christ that we overcome the world. Do not look to your own strength, for you are dead in your sins, but look to our Lord Jesus Christ, for He has defeated Satan and his dominion and has taken from him the keys of death and hell. The temptations you face you do not face alone. Your Lord and your God stands between you and the evil one, taking the blows meant for you, taking the beating that was to be yours. The fiery arrows of the evil one are quenched by the blood of the Lamb. Your Lord stands before you, an ever-present help in time of trouble, not simply to strengthen you, but to do it for you. He is not a great cheerleader, cheering you on to victory. He has already done it; it is finished. There is no temptations left that He has not conquered, there are no sins that He has not died for. You are free from the

bondage of sin and slavery, free to be the people of God, holy and righteous in His sight all the days of your lives.

Your heavenly Father loves you. He guards and keeps you so that the devil, the world, and your sinful nature do not deceive you or mislead you into false belief, despair, or other great shame and vice. Such is the will of God, to strengthen and keep you in His Word until He Himself takes you from this valley of tears to Himself in heaven. This is the good and gracious will of God.

In the name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT.

✠ AMEN ✠