

## 2025 C 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent March 09

The readings for Lent's 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday present a review of God's intervention into his chosen people's story.

Paul's text sets a stage for today's Gospel, **the showdown between Jesus, Son of God, and the devil, enemy of God's people**. Paul explains that confessing Jesus by mouth saying, **"God, the Father, raised him (Jesus Christ) from the dead"** with a belief in the heart plays a large part in an act of faith.

Jesus' conversation with the devil is more likely the same as us having a conversation with the devil. I don't see a man in red tights, carrying a pitchfork. I hear a whisper to do something I have no business doing or urging me to refrain from doing what I should do. He personifies the inner spiritual struggles that all of us face.

Paul says in Eph. 6 Ch. Our fight is not against people on earth but against the powers of evil in the heavens. ... He calls us to use the shield of faith with which you can stop all the burning arrows of the evil One. The Bible names a real and present foe of our faith: the Devil.

Jesus was fresh out of the Jordan River after his baptism buoyed by God's blessings. Yet he began his public ministry, not by healing the sick or preaching a sermon, but by exposing the scheme of Satan. A perfect place to begin.

How do we explain our badness? Our stubborn hearts and hurtful hands. How do we explain the invasion of Ukraine, the war between Israel and Hamas, human trafficking and abuse? Shop liftings, killings, inflation. What will we see?

If I were the devil, I would blame evil on a broken political system, a crippled economy, the roll of a dice, the wicked Witch of the West. You cannot figure it out? If you cannot diagnose the source of your illness, how can you treat them? If I were the devil, I'd keep my name out of it.

But God doesn't let the devil get away with this and tells us his name. The Greek word for devil is **diabolos** with the verb **diaballein** which means **"to split."** The devil is a splitter, divider, a wedge driver. He divided Adam and Eve from God in the garden. Don't fault the plunging economy or raging dictator for your anxiety. Satan is not

absent from God's story. He is at its center. We cannot understand God's narrative without understanding Satan's strategy. In fact, "the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8).

Nothing thrills Satan more than the current skepticism with which he rubs his hands with glee.

Jesus didn't doubt the reality of the devil. The Savior strode into the badlands with one goal, to unmask Satan, and made him the first stop on his itinerary. **"Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil."**

The devil doesn't ever make a direct attack. He sneaks in when you are not looking right and get you. Watch for his tricks. Then, you can know what to expect.

When General George Patton counterattacked Field Marshal Rommel in World War II, Patton is reported to have shouted in the thick of battle, **"I read your book, Rommel! I read your book!"** Patton had studied Rommel's strategy attacks and planned his moves accordingly. We can know the same about the devil.

**Satan looks first for weak spots to attack us.** 40 days of fasting left Jesus famished, so Satan began with the topic of bread. Jesus' stomach was empty. So, to the stomach Satan turned.

**Where are you empty?** Are you hungry for attention, craving for success, longing for intimacy? Beware of your weakness. Bring them to God before Satan brings them to you. Satan will tell you to turn stones into bread. In other words, meet your own needs. Take matters into your hands. Leave God out of the picture.

**Whereas Jesus teaches us to pray for bread (Matt 6.11).** Satan says to work for bread. Besides he said, **"If you are the Son of God,"** you can do this. Make Christians think they have to prove their position with rock-to-bread miracles. If Satan convinces you to trust your works over God's Word, he has you dangling from a broken limb. Our works will never hold us. Jesus didn't even sniff the bait. Three times he repeated, **"It is written ...."** In his book, God's book enough. Jesus overcame temptation, not with special voices or supernatural signs, but by remembering and quoting scripture.

If I were the devil, I wouldn't want you to underline Scripture quotes.

Satan regrouped and tried different approach. This one may surprise you. He told Jesus to show off in the church. **“Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple.** “If you are the Son of God;” he said, “throw yourself down.”

Testing is not limited to the desert. It also occurs in the sanctuary. Jesus refused, not because he couldn't, not because God wouldn't catch him. He refused because he didn't have to prove anything to anyone, much less the devil.

Neither do you. Satan is going to tell you otherwise. In church, of all places, he will tell you to do tricks: impress others with your service, make show of your faith, call attention to your good deeds. He loves to turn church services into Las Vegas presentations. Don't be suckered.

Satan's last shot began with **the mountain climb.** “The devil took him to a very high mountain.” Another note of Satan's playbook: Promise heights, the first place, the peak, the pinnacle. The best, the most, the top. These are the Satan's famous words.

**“All this I will give you,”** Satan said, **“if you bow down and worship me.”**

Oops. Satan showed his cards. **He wants worship.** He wants you and me to tell him how great he is. He wants to write his own story in which he is the hero and God is an afterthought. Satan wants God's place. But God isn't moving. Satan covets the throne of heaven, but God isn't leaving. Satan wants to win you to his side.

**You don't have to face Satan alone.** You know his schemes. He will attack your weak spots first. He will tell you to meet your own needs. When you question your identity as a child of God, that is Satan speaking. If you turn church into talent show, now you know why.

Even more, **now you know what to do. Pray.** You cannot battle with Satan on your own. He is a roaring lion, a fallen angel, a seasoned fighter, and an equipped soldier. He is angry – angry because he knows that his time is short, and that God's victory is secure.

Satan is a skillful, powerful, ruthless foe who seeks to destroy you. He is armed with cruel hate. On earth is there no equal. But there is good news for the Christian: **Christ reigns as our protector and provider. We are more than conquerors through Him** (Rev. 8:37).

**Arm yourselves with God's Word.** Load your pistol with Scripture. And keep a finger on the trigger. And remember: "Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, authorities, powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Eph 6:12).

If I were the devil, I wouldn't want you know that. But I am not the devil. So, good for you. And take that, Satan!