



## “Immediately the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness.”<sup>1</sup>

“Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness...”<sup>2</sup>

Fr. Luke Sidarous sermons

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Temptation Sunday

- ❖ “We ask, why did Jesus Christ fast forty days and forty nights? For us—He fasted for each of us. For this reason, the Lenten fast has become an integral part of our lives, since He fasted for us.

During those forty days, He was being tempted by the devil.

Another Gospel explains He had been tempted with every kind of temptation (“...when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him...”)<sup>3</sup>—all the temptation and deceit with which the devil tempts all mankind.

Of course, the devil tempts every person, seeking their death by separating us from God. He is against God and is the enemy of all goodness and light.

So, when the devil tempts, it is not for entertainment, but for death and destruction.

He tempted Christ because he saw Christ as a man, and the devil wanted Christ to be subject to him.

Christ did not defeat the devil; Christ annihilated and crushed the devil and all his means, weapons, trickeries, and ways.

Christ was victorious, not because He is God—for He fasted forty days for me, for us. When Christ permitted the devil to tempt Him, this was also done on our behalf, for us, and on our account.

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<sup>1</sup> Mk. 1:12

<sup>2</sup> Mt. 4:1-11; Lk. 4: 1-13

<sup>3</sup> Lk. 4:13

This is our joy and confidence in God; we are all tempted and sometimes we fail. But our hope that is in Christ never fails; if I fall, Christ will raise me up. When I fall, I return to Christ, hold on to Him, and rise.

❖ St. Paul said that like us, Christ was tempted in every way; but Christ was without sin.<sup>4</sup>

For the tempter approaches me, but within me there is vileness; that is why the devil defeats me. But Christ said, 'The ruler of this world has nothing in Me'.<sup>5</sup>

So, repentance is the cleansing of the heart. When the devil approaches and finds your heart is all light—with no darkness of thought or intention for him to dwell and hide in—he departs.

St. Macarius the Great saw the devil's trickery in the wilderness—the desert. He was very fearful of the numerous snares and traps the devil set to capture and deceive even the saints and prophets.

St. Macarius cried, "Who can escape all these traps?" A voice from heaven announced, "The humble shall escape."

Now, we have the key to victory.

And it is written in all the chronicles of the saints and the fathers, how they defeated and humiliated the devil through one thing only.

The devil said to St. Macarius, "You stay up all night praying, and I do not sleep. You fast, and I do not eat. One thing you do defeats me: your humility."

We struggle and fail often until we realise the great virtue of denying the self: humility.

Once it is realised, you abide in Christ, for Christ said, "...learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart."<sup>6</sup>

'You will find rest in Me—in your wars against the devil—if you hold on to Me.'

The main reason we fail in our spiritual struggles is pride—my reliance on myself, my cleverness. Pride is the opening through which the devil traps us.

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<sup>4</sup> Heb. 4: 15

<sup>5</sup> Jn. 14: 30

<sup>6</sup> Mt. 11: 29

When the Israelites defeated Amalek, God told Moses to write in the book of Exodus, "...the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation."<sup>7</sup>

Amalek was a tribe—a nation of giants who, like pride, is defeated by the meek and humble.

In the prophecies we read during the fast, we read the story of Goliath, who was defeated by a child.<sup>8</sup>

The key is humility; if a person cannot humble themselves, try as they might, they will be defeated. Even from within, they are aware their own pride has defeated them.

The saints trampled on their pride; they even allowed others to trample on it; that is why they soared spiritually, and the devil feared them; believe it.

**"Resist the devil and he will flee from you."**<sup>9</sup>

The devil would fear the saints and disappear from before them in a cloud of smoke.

So, can I be victorious against the temptations I face? Yes—through the Grace of God, in Christ who is in me, by the Spirit of God that dwells in me—yes, for I have authority, even against sins that have troubled me for years. I can be victorious. Yes, through my trust in God and humility, denying the self.

There were three temptations as written by the authors of the Gospels, who were inspired by the Holy Spirit. But Christ was tempted with all kinds of temptations.

David the prophet wrote, "For by You I can run against a troop."<sup>10</sup> By You, Lord, I can run through an army—through Christ who defeated the devil.

**"...I can leap over a wall."**

So, we can ask the Father, "...do not lead us into temptation."<sup>11</sup> Why? Because I am weak; because I know myself. So, ask sincerely that God does not lead us into temptation.

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<sup>7</sup> Ex. 17: 16

<sup>8</sup> 1 Sam. 17

<sup>9</sup> Jam. 4: 7

<sup>10</sup> Ps. 18: 29

<sup>11</sup> Mt. 6: 13

**“But deliver us from the evil one”**—the devil, for his accusations are severe, and he is mighty against me, but only the humble are saved.

The fathers contemplated the virtue of humility. One of them said, “If you gather 20 to 30 sticks in one bunch, and begin to strike the heads of those sticks from the top, if one stick is short, it will not be struck, but all the blows will fall on the proud ones.

The wars of the devil will strike the proud, but the humble will not be affected.

The key to defeating the devil and being victorious in very difficult and fearful temptations is to have true fellowship and communion with God. Ask Him, ‘lead us not into temptation,’ and for humility.

When St. Anthony left the world and all its glory, he faced the devil and his demons, who fought against him in many fearful battles. He would tell them, “Why are there so many of you? I am weak; just one of you could overcome me.” He could even humble himself before the demons. But he was supported by the power of God and overcame the devil.

Enough of believing we are strong enough to fight temptation with our wisdom, power, and will alone. The devil is not defeated by any of these.

For the devil is a logical, rational being—he has a mind without a physical body.

We will overcome, if we deny the self and truly abide in Christ, calling on Christ in the time of trouble, with a sincere heart. ‘Help me Lord; my enemies have gathered around me,<sup>12</sup> to destroy me.’

Can the devil finally win? Never. Can darkness overcome light? Impossible. Can death defeat the resurrection? Never.

We have hope in Christ; that hope never fails, for we do not rely on our abilities or righteousness, but on our Saviour, who fasted for us and crushed the devil under the feet of His children.

Glory be to God. Amen.”

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<sup>12</sup> Ps. 22: 16