

The Temptations (not Musical Ones)

Intro. There is a parallel to this gospel in Deuteronomy. After years of testing in the desert, the Israelites were about to enter the Promised Land. Moses reminded them of their covenant with God who brought them out of Egypt. A re-occurring image in Israel's tradition is their *identity as God's sons and daughters* [Sacra Pagina, Matthew, D.J. Harrington, p. 67]. In the desert, God tested the Israelites and they complained about the lack of water (Ex. 17:1-7) and food (Ex. 16). Again and again, the Israelites failed the tests. In this gospel, the Lord, never forgetting he was God's Son, *passed* every test.

1. Matthew – as do Mark and Luke - tells us something interesting about the way the Lord went to the desert: *the Spirit led him there*. Nowhere does

it say the Spirit then abandoned the Lord. The purpose was to prepare himself for his three-year mission. After fasting all those days the Lord was hungry and weak. The temptations showed up (not the musical group) and attempted to get him to question his identity as God's Son. Two of the tests began with, "*If you are* the Son of God..." prove it by making bread from rocks and throwing yourself off the top of the temple. The third test was the most serious: to worship evil in exchange "for all the power and riches of the world. As God's Son, they were *already* his. Temptations are not necessarily logical. Unable to tempt the Lord, the evil one was banished, to await another chance. The evil one always waits for an opportunity to tempt us. Sometimes it is when we are weak. Not necessarily weak from hunger for food, but tired, stressed,

angry, lonely or sad. At other times the evil one trips us when we think we are in control of our lives and don't need anyone's help, including God's. The temptations show up and we fall for them.

Concl. The Spirit leads *us* into Lent. What are our *real* temptations? Not the simple ones like cookies or chocolate or candy. I mean the serious ones like the lack of respect for other people or ourselves. This season is specifically for wrestling with temptation and coming up with a plan and putting it into action these forty days. The first thing is to *identify* our temptations. That might be the easiest part. We know them well. The hard part is how we *avoid* them. Maybe at the end of Lent, we can know our real temptations and a few ways to stay away from them. As a community, together we are strongly *encouraged* to sacrifice something we enjoy in order

to focus on this different “time” we are in. Sacrifices are helpful *if we choose* to make them ourselves or are willing to accept a challenge with a friend.

Otherwise our attitude for Lent is resentful and not true sacrifice. *Choose challenging sacrifices.* If you like meat or fish at every meal then choose something else. If you are vegan, I wouldn't suggest meat, but something else. A new question: Is eating a juicy, non-meat burger okay? Technically, yes, but that is missing the spirit of Lent, kind of cheating the system. **The same question in all the testing of the Lord applies to our temptations: are we daughters and sons of God? The the answer is in our behavior.**

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