

Week 9: March 16, 2011
THE 612
Joseph Hollcraft M.A.

XVII. The Temptations of Jesus. The Baptism of Jesus and Temptations of Jesus are intimately connected and are a profound revelation of how Christ wishes to be in solidarity with the human condition. Christ does not seek creaturely comforts, and he goes where battles are fought: the depth of man's heart and the desert. It is here where he meets the "accuser". Christ goes to the place of desolation—utter poverty, to reveal the space where we are called to go to overcome the battles between good and evil (there is a reason why the Lenten season starts here). As the New Adam, Christ reverses the fortune of the first Adam by redeeming man via a wholly different place—the desert. Christ shows us that we must go through the desert and overcome the temptations of the adversary if we are to regain the new paradise (generation...life/death/rebirth).

- A. *"Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And he fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was hungry"* (Mt. 4:1-2).
- a. The spirit's first charge was to send Christ into the desert, and by embracing the spirit's first commission Christ enters into the drama of the human existence (Benedict, 26).
 - b. The Forty Days are reminiscent of the great stories of salvation history: Abraham, Moses, and the nation of Israel. Christ's flight into the desert reveals the ways in which the great figures of the OC came up short, and what is essential to the NC.
 - a. In particular, what Matthew records reflect the chronological order of the three tests faced by Israel. Whereas Israel, called "son" by God (Hosea 11:1; Deut.8:5), failed each of the tests, Jesus reveals steadfastness and worthiness to be the Son of God by responding to each test with single-heartedness, resolute faithfulness and fierce loyalty.
 1. Essentially, Israel had failed in the desert, but Jesus would not. His loyal bond with his Father was too strong for even the demons of the desert to break.
- B. *"And the Tempter came and said to him: 'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread'. But he answered: 'It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'"* (Mt.4:3-4).
- a. **Bread:** The first temptation in Matthew's account parallels Israel's hunger before it received the gift of bread from heaven (cf. Ex.16:1-4). The grumbling of Exodus 16:3 reveals Israel's utter faithlessness; God's son Israel does not trust the Almighty to provide and thus betrays the covenant relationship that requires confident trust in God's readiness and ability to fulfill his covenant obligations (cf. Gn.15:6).
 - a. A note of grammatical structure. Both the Hebrew and Greek use verbal participle to construct a noun with a definitive article. This is the law of being.
 1. God's name itself: "The One who is being"
 2. Mary: "The One who has been graced"
 3. Tempter: "The One who tempts"
 - b. We do not possess life by consuming bread, but simply and solely because it is God's will that we live. For this reason, those who claim to follow Jesus cannot become dependent on the things of this world. When we are not dependent on material things, and not on God, we give in to temptation and sin.
 - a. Jesus faithfully remembers that he is totally dependent upon God, and he does so by embracing a symbol of austerity—the stone.

1. Rabbi Loeb once said, “how easy is it for the poor man to trust in God. In what else is he to trust? How hard it is for the rich man to trust in God, when all his earthly possessions are crying ‘trust in me’”. Once again, Satan is busy counterfeiting certain realities...even absolute trust.
- c. *‘If you are the Son of God’* (Mt.4:3, 6; 27:40). Here, reflect upon Benedict’s words (read p.30). Proof or invitation (what has lasting power...ownership). This “show me” moment has no lasting power—motus operandi verses motus agenda. A tangible sign of a person of faith is the one who possesses joy no matter what God chooses to do or not to do in any given situation.
 - a. “If” followed by the indicative, points to Satan not questioning the identity of the Messiah, but challenging it...remember, Jesus is the first to proclaim Jesus as “the Holy One of God” (Mk.1:24)
 - d. Satan’s temptation is not only to the one who will become bread (cf. Jn.6), but the purpose of it: to know God (Benedict, 33). Food itself ought to draw us into a place of gratitude where every bite we eat has the same appreciation as the bite of the one who is without (material and spiritual poverty)...reflect upon the Word of God (cf. Jer.15:6).
- C. *“Then the devil took him to the holy city, and set him on the pinnacle of the temple. And said to him: ‘If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down”* (Mt. 4:5-6a). Then they exchange scripture passages with Christ quoting Deuteronomy: *“You must not put the Lord your God to the test as you did at Massah”* (Deut: 16:6).
- a. **Tempting God.** The rebellious people of little faith and trust challenge God to fulfill his obligations of the covenant. Jesus, on the other hand, refuses to demonstrate God’s presence with him by leaping from the parapet of the Temple. He refuses to jump because honoring God excludes every kind of manipulation, including putting God to the test. When we truly honor God, we have nothing to prove to anyone!
 - a. Honor and worship.
 - b. The movement from temptation number one to temptation number two reveals one of Satan’s great tactics: change of décor and location to distract and confuse. Perpetual motion and change on the surface for the quick production thrill. This particular change offers a pseudo piety and bogus option. It’s as if Satan’s saying: “From the depths of the desert to the pinnacle of the temple, I wish to send you through a journey that even the Arabian nights would be envious of”...Satan deploying all strategy to distract God (Merikakis).
 - a. At the end of the Gospel story of Jesus, the Son of God will truly leap into the abyss of death, because he is absolutely convinced that it is God’s will that he do so (Mt. 26:39; 53; 27:46).
 1. Peter’s challenge...providence and evil.
 - a. **Who does Christ cite (Jews/Judas/crowds/the devil)?
The Father!**
 - c. Satan quoting scripture: A tool of modernism (read Benedict p.35-36). Essentially, Satan fulfilling the essence of his being which is to tempt and confuse, wishes to upstart a new creation through the Word.
 - a. Christ responds to Satan’s second cross with his divine filiation by quoting Moses—don’t press God for miracles.
- D. *“Again the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; and he said to him, all these I will give to you, if you will fall down and worship me’.* Then Jesus said to him, *‘Begone, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve’”* (Mt.4:8-10).

- a. **Idolatry and Power.** The third temptation is all about idolatry: the worship of false gods and power. Once again this episode closely follows Deuteronomy: *"You shall fear the Lord your God; you shall serve him, and swear by his name. You shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the people who are around you"* (Deut.6:13-14).
- b. Idolatry and power was a genuine temptation for many who desired to take part fully in the political and economic strata of the Greco-Roman machine.
 - a. The first hearers and readers of Matthew's gospel were well aware of the compromises required by those seeking and holding public office even on the part of those who only desired to do good...some things have not changed (Rosica). There will always be a tension between faith and political power...the world has no patience for the meekness of faith. In the words of Pope Benedict XVI: faith will bend to the criteria of political power (read Benedict, 40).

<u>Power from above</u>	<u>Power from below</u>
Submits (powerlessness)	resists (controlling)
Christ: son of the Father	Barabbas: son of the father
Messianic figure (heavenly)	messianic figure (earthly)
Kingdom of God	kingdom of man

- 1. Is Christ reduced to the private sphere or is he in the public square...Church history is chalk-full of martyrs because they saw that Christ belonged in the public sphere.
- c. Satan's last temptation is "I shall give" (Mt.4:9)...the concupiscent appetite is directly challenged. Here Satan looks to exchange worldly power and possessions for adoration and worship.
 - a. Christ's response, "away with you Satan", completes the triad of identities taken on by the Devil: "Accuser"; the Tempter: "Tempter or wicked enticement"; and Satan: "Adversary or Enemy".
 - 1. Christ's response—God alone...the most fundamental principle of all religion—adoration!
 - 2. Heaven comes to earth to encircle the King of Kings, not to save him from some suicidal plummet, but simply to be at the "service of he who is Wisdom". The term is best translated "at the banquet table". Here there is a contrast to the first temptation.
- d. The entire third temptation assures us of Jesus' undivided loyalty. At the very beginning of Jesus' campaign for this world and for each one of us, God's only begotten Son confronted the enemy.
 - a. Christ goes into the heart of temptation and spiritual warfare with a mastery of Sacred Scripture—we ought to do the same!

<http://www.firstthings.com/article/2008/09/002-how-the-world-lost-its-story-13>