

Lent 1, February 22, 2015

Help Me O Lord!

Mark 1:9–15



Dear Friends in Christ

Have you ever been tempted? We all have been tempted! In fact we are tempted all the time, even Jesus was tempted as our Gospel lessons for today tells us. The question is how do we deal with temptations, do we cave in and give up, after all we are humans and God will forgive us? Or do we stand against the forces of temptation?

But what is temptation? It is the “Seduction to evil, solicitation to wrong. It stands distinguished from trials.” A “trial tests, seeks to discover the man's moral qualities or character; but temptation persuades to evil, deludes” so that man gets destroyed. Trial is to “undeceive,” but temptation is to deceive. Trial “aims at the man's good, making him conscious of his true moral self, “but temptation aims at a

person’s evil leading the person more or less unconsciously into sin. “God tries but Satan tempts.” (Based on the illustration by Fairbairn, quoted in “The Words and Works of Jesus Christ” J.D. Pentecost, p. 99.)

And that’s what Satan is doing to Jesus Here in our Gospel lesson. And it happens just right after Jesus gets baptised.

It seems that Mark doesn’t waste any time. One of his favorite words is “immediately.” The word drags us by the hand from scene to scene as Jesus heals people, casts out demons, forgives sins, and raises the dead. But the first place we encounter the word is in Jesus’ Baptism. We can almost still hear the Father’s words “You are my beloved Son” (v 11), and the water seems to have barely dried on Jesus’ head when the Holy Spirit pushes him into the wilderness. “The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness” (v 12). Why? To be tempted. And that’s crucial! It is crucial because we are tempted too! The reason Jesus was tempted wasn’t to see if he could sin but rather to prove that he couldn’t sin, and to help us to trust him to help us urgently, in our temptations. So, when we do sense an urgent temptation, we find comfort in Jesus’ own temptation and assurance that he comes with urgency to help us in ours, and because He was able to overcome will help us to do the same.

A few years ago magazine called “Discipleship Journal” surveyed its readers in this subject and found several areas of spiritual challenges the readers faced, according to they ranked the responses thus:

1. Materialism.
2. Pride.
3. Self-centeredness.
4. Laziness.
5. (Tie) Anger/Bitterness.
5. (Tie) Sexual lust.
7. Envy.

8. Gluttony.

9. Lying.

Survey respondents noted temptations were more potent when they had neglected their time with God (81 percent) and when they were physically tired (57 percent). Resisting temptation was accomplished by prayer (84 percent), avoiding compromising situations (76 percent), Bible study (66 percent), and being accountable to someone (52 percent). (Discipleship Journal, November / December, 1992.)

Temptation is a hard thing isn't, especially under those circumstances that the surveyed pointed out. And in those moments of temptations we really need an immediate, an urgent response from God. Yes we are to be in prayer and Bible study, yes we need to avoid compromising situations and our brothers and sister accountability, but in all It is Jesus who can help us overcome temptation, for temptations are hard.

Fortunately Jesus knows what that is like to be tempted. That's why in our Gospel reading we are told that Jesus immediately goes from waters of his baptism into the wilderness. The Holy Spirit, who descended upon Jesus in his Baptism, now drives him into the desert with the same urgency with which God took the children of Israel from Egypt into freedom.

Was Jesus' temptation an occasional thought that passed through his mind while he fasted? Was he limited to one temptation a day or two or three? Mark doesn't give us much details regarding the temptations, but he does teach us that: Jesus was tempted all forty days of his time there, for "he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan" (v 13) but never gave in to those temptations. So that He would comfort us with the assurance that He is able to overcome the evil one. As the New Testament writer of Hebrews tells us: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15).

That Jesus was tempted in every respect may be offensive to some people, perhaps even to you—to think Jesus was tempted by the most wicked of sins. Was Jesus tempted to steal? Okay, that we can understand. How about to curse? Possibly at the Pharisees when they were pestering him, sure. To commit adultery? Now that begins to make us uncomfortable. That might be so, but we cannot hide the fact that Jesus was tempted in every respect throughout those forty days and throughout his ministry.

To the very end, Jesus is tempted—even on the cross. Satan didn't just tempt Jesus during those 40 days in the wilderness but more so towards the end of Jesus ministry, there Satan waited for a more "opportune time" (Lk 4:13). I think we would have understood it if Jesus had cursed his enemies, to have cursed throughout the incredible pain he suffered on the cross. But Jesus did not. He prayed to his Father; he prayed for his enemies; he gave comfort to the repentant thief who at least once and probably more times had given in to temptation that led to his own crucifixion. Jesus prayed for you and your temptations even as he died for you. And this was for you. By his complete and full temptation, without sin, without faltering one single time, Jesus has credited your account with perfect resistance of all temptation.

Now, what about us, here and now? How is our life of temptation? Do we also struggle in the same way as the "Discipleship Journal" reports?

Do we struggle with:

1. Materialism.
2. Pride.
3. Self-centeredness.
4. Laziness.
5. Anger/Bitterness.
5. Sexual lust.
7. Envy.
8. Gluttony.
9. Lying.

There is something about materialism being at the top. No, maybe we are not struggling with laying or gluttony but in material things we all struggle with temptations don't we.

But remember that at your Baptism, these words were prayed: "And deliver us from temptation." Jesus has been and will continue to be by your tempted side until you are finally at peace and rest eternally with him. Because you are declared also to be the beloved son or daughter of the heavenly Father, you have all the help of his Son, Jesus.

Oftentimes, Satan plays the same old song of your temptations. Satan is a keen observer of behavior, and he will not let up until you breathe your last. And he knows our week spots, satan knows what we like and what gives us pleasure. Take lust for example, "gets its power by persuading me to believe that I will be more happy if I follow it. The power of all temptation is the prospect that it will make me happier." (E. Lutzer, Putting Your Past Behind You, Here's Life, 1990, p.54.) And Satan knows that we want to be happy, let's face it, who doesn't. but just because you want to be happy and you can argue that is your right, be careful that satan would not trick you by telling you lies. Only Christ can make you truly happy.

Yes, we know temptations are strong. But you are not without help and hope. Remember, Jesus was tempted in every way, and that means Jesus was tempted the ways you are tempted.

If you are tempted with 1. Materialism, 2. Pride, 3. Self-centeredness, 4. Laziness, 5. Anger/Bitterness, 5. Sexual lust. 7. Envy, 8. Gluttony, and 9. Lying.

Jesus is with you in each of those temptations. He is there, not only watching what you are doing, but helping you to say no to temptations. As you understand and know that He is there the offensiveness of satan's temptations slips away.

After all "We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:15–16).

As tempted people, dare we draw near to God's throne of grace? Certainly you can! Jesus has opened the way for you. Not only do we hold on to our Savior Jesus, who has been through the very temptations you are going through, but we also cry out our urgent prayers to our heavenly Father, who hears every word. In his own prayer, Jesus puts into your mouth the very words of his temptation experience: "And lead us not into temptation."

And when do we so often pray these words? Immediately! Urgently! before the Lord's Supper, where we receive the body and blood of Jesus, who resisted all temptation. Dear people of God, this precious gift strengthens you, your flesh and mind and spirit, in times of temptation . . . and forgives you for every time you give in to those temptations. Jesus is here for you, even now—right now!—in your temptation, to help you resist and to restore you when you fall. Jesus, who was tempted, helps you when you are tempted. Thank God that he was and that he was for you, now with all confidence and trust can say: help me O Lord! Come quickly help me!

In Jesus name, amen.