

Lent 1, 2019
The Struggle is Real
St. Matthew 4:1-11
St. Andrew's – Jacksonville, OR
By Fr. Bill Baker

“Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred.”

With cupboards lined with potato chip bags and snacks of all sorts it is hard for me to image going without food for so long. I doubt any of us could ever achieve such a feat. Yet, in His humanity, Jesus prevails in His forty day fast and the devil is waiting in the wings ready to strike while the iron is hot.

The Struggle is real. When we are hungry we are susceptible to the snares of sin and the devil targets where we are most vulnerable. Our hunger for money, for success, for fame or even image can play into the devils hands and lead us into paths that will eventually turn our attention from Godly lives to lives satisfied only by worldly endeavors. Even some Christian artists are turning their Christian talents over to secular music for fame and fortune.

Does the devil care if you are hungry? If he can use it against you he does. In our Gospel reading today I find it very enlightening that the devil never really offers Jesus anything concrete to satisfy His need. His real intent is to get Jesus (and us) to defy God, to trick us into believing that we are the ones with the power. So, knowing that Jesus is in physical need of food, the devil charges Jesus to turn the stones into bread. We have all heard the phrase, “The devil made me do it”, but that’s not really true. The devil has no power to make you do anything. But, what he can do is whisper in your ear, play on your weaknesses, entice you away from God’s will, make you believe you are in charge of your destiny, and give you a false hope that you can trust solely in yourself.

Could Jesus have turned the stones into bread? Of course. But Jesus, in his humanity, is confronting the difference in a love for the world verses

a full and complete love within the arms of God. The life of bread is a short life while the life lived within the body of Christ is eternally upheld by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Eat bread to sustain the body given you by your Father in Heaven, but live your lives by the Word of God and your hunger for the things of this world will be seen in a truer light and you will then find your contentment within the will of God.

But, the devil still will not let up...the struggle is real. Seeing that Jesus will not satisfy his basic need over his need for the word of God, the devil tries another tactic. He leads Jesus to a pinnacle of the temple where he commands our Lord to prove himself by casting himself down, thus proving his trust in God. *"If thou be the Son of God, the devil attacks, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge over thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up..."*

I hope all of us understand the great chasm that lies between a true faith in God and the disloyal tempting of God. Jesus Take the Wheel is a song written from the point of view of a woman whose faith seems to be dwindling. Life of late has been hard and she and her baby are headed home to her parents to spend Christmas. She hits black ice and loses control of her car. Fear radiates within for her life and the life of her baby...she is no longer in control. Throwing up her hands she cries "Jesus take the wheel, take this from my hands cause I can't do this on my own." Sometimes our faith is manifested in its greatest degree when we realize that we are not in control.

There is a stark difference between throwing your hands up in faith when all seems lost versus an arrogant faith that says "hey ya'll watch this, I'm going to jump off this building and God is going to hold out his hand and set me safely on the ground." Ludacris...but it happens! There are those who feel so spiritually superior that they will tempt God and place themselves and others in danger. God does not test the faithful by submitting himself to the will of mankind but emphatically implores us to not tempt Him! In our weakness we may feel that we lack faith, our lives may be turned upside down by loss or illness, but I remind you that legitimate faith is more fully exposed during our most trying times when we must rest in God's love and not tempt it by treating God as our personal magician.

But the devil is relentless. *“Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto him, all these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.”* Ah! Now we see truth behind the lie! He promises that which tempts you the most, but Satan does not care to help you, satisfy you or give you anything to prosper you. Our time in this world is limited and in the end the devil wants only your allegiance. And he would have it if were not for Jesus Christ. Our Lord, by the mere act of allowing himself to be tempted of the devil showed us that through himself only can we and will we prevail against the slings and arrows of the devil. Jesus said, *“Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve”*. Christ has shown us that the devil cannot make you do anything, that tempting God in faith is not faith at all and that our true allegiance is to our Father in heaven.

“Then the devil leaveth him, and behold, angels came and ministered unto him.”

“Here we are shown (says St. Hilary) that we too, when we have repulsed the devil, and crushed his head under our heel, shall not want for the ministry of angels, and the friendly aid of the heavenly powers.”

Brothers and Sisters, the struggle is real. As we pray and worship together in this season of Lent, reflect often on the example set by Christ. It is He whom we follow and in Him that we rest. He overcame the best and the worst the devil had to offer and so can we. It is our fortunate reality over these forty days to be reminded of the deadliness of sin being conquered by the very blood of Jesus Christ. *“The Lord hath made known his salvation: his righteousness hath he openly shewed in the sight of the heathen”* (Psalm 98:2). The body and blood of our Savior is offered up for you...may we come penitentially to the altar of our God freely giving ourselves into His service.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.