

Jesus' temptation in the wilderness occurred immediately after his baptism. The Spirit swept him out into isolation, so that along with the anointing he had received at his baptism, these forty days of fasting and prayer would lay the foundation for the rest of his life: his public ministry.

It may sound strange to learn that he was not hungry until *after* the forty days. I've heard it described that during long fasts, the body adapts to burning stored fat, and after a few days, one does not feel hungry until one's fat stores are burned up, which may take weeks. At that point, the body begins to break down muscle in order to stay alive. The body is beginning to die, and the hunger returns. Jesus was at that stage after forty days.¹

Hungry, tired and in a vulnerable state, Jesus was suddenly confronted by the devil in the form of three temptations. There are numerous ways to understand these temptations, but one way is to see them as temptation for control.

- To have control over things: "*Use your power, to change these rocks into bread...*"
- To have control over people: "*I'll give you power over the kingdoms of the world...*"
- To have control over God: "*Leap off the temple, God will take care of you...*"

I read a reflection on these temptations that suggested it was the second of these temptations that was most serious. The devil said to him, "*Worship me*". We might find it difficult to believe that Jesus would really be tempted to worship Satan. But consider: What's the one thing Satan has that Jesus does not? The souls of the damned.²

Satan is offering Christ this deal: If you do things *your* way—allowing people to choose for or against God—only some of will be saved and others will be with me forever in hell. But if you do things *my* way—if you bow down to me and my will—I will release them all to you, and you will get what you most want: to save everybody, all the children of your Father, whom you so dearly love.³

That was Jesus' dilemma. But doesn't it seem like a good thing to say yes to? It leads us to ask: Doesn't a very, very good end justify an evil means? Isn't it right to do wrong sometimes? Said another way: Are God's Commandments really absolute?⁴

As we know, Jesus resisted the temptations because he came into the world above all, to do not his own will, but his Father's will. Each of us are frequently tempted to choose our will over the Father's, to soften his demands, to justify our way and our choices.

On one hand, if we're being honest, God's law is very easy to understand, but on the other hand, it's often hard to carry out. We're tempted to make it easier on ourselves, by pretending that God's law is harder to understand than it is in actual reality.⁵

St. Luke tells us that Jesus refused all three temptations, because he knew that all temptations come from the devil. He won the battle for now, but our reading ends ominously. It says that the devil "*departed from him for a time*".

Indeed, he would return again. If you've seen the movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, you likely recall in the opening scene, where Jesus is experiencing his agony in the garden, convulsing, sweating profusely, and groaning, as he kneels in prayer.

Suddenly, an ominous figure appears, off to the side, looking over him. It asks, "*Do you really believe that one man can bear the full burden of sin?*" Whether the devil himself or one of his demons, that devilish figure, was pressing again

¹ Bergsma, John. *The Word of the Lord: Reflections on the Sunday Mass Readings for Year C* (p. 102). Emmaus Road Publishing. Kindle Edition.

² Kreeft, Peter. *Food for the Soul: Reflections on the Mass Readings (Cycle C) (Food for the Soul Series Book 3)* (p. 197). Word On Fire. Kindle Edition.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

upon the temptation first presented to Jesus in the wilderness, as though saying, *“Worship me, because your suffering won’t free all those you love. I’ve got a better way.”*

Then a snake is shown moving toward Jesus, as he is prostrate on the ground in a deep state of anguish. Jesus says, *“Father, your will be done, not mine”*, and slowly finds strength to stand. Suddenly, his foot comes down hard on the serpent.

Like Jesus in his temptations, we are at war, whether or not we can recognize it or want to acknowledge it. To live is to engage in spiritual warfare, and our heavenly Father commands us to not compromise with the enemy.⁶

I suspect every one of us has moments in which we agonize over the good things we want for those we love, and I suspect this is especially true for parents regarding their children. We can see that there’s something good and we desire it for them, yet too often they don’t desire it for themselves, and thus it cuts to the heart. Jesus, in his temptation, agonizes for us, that somehow, we will want something other than the Father’s will and the heaven he holds in store for us.

Will we trust in His will for our lives, or will we hear the voice that tells us there’s a better way, an easier way?

⁶ Ibid.