

I LENT– 1st March 2020

AFTER FASTING FOR FORTY DAYS AND FORTY NIGHTS, HE WAS HUNGRY

Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

Matthew 4,1-11

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.” Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written: “He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.” Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.” Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’” Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

The four mountains that are mentioned in Matthew's gospel are connected, they are related to each other: the mountain of the beatitudes, corresponds to the mountain of the resurrection, that is, by living the beatitudes, you have an effective life of overcoming death ; the mountain of temptations, where the devil offers the divine condition to Jesus, as long as he worships power, corresponds to the mountain of the transfiguration, where Jesus will demonstrate that the divine condition is not obtained through power, but through love and the generous gift of himself. Let's see this fourth chapter of Matthew's gospel, where these temptations of Jesus are presented, which, in order to understand them better, we must put them in their context, they are not temptations, the temptations seem something that pushes us to evil, to sin, nothing of all this. The devil, as we will now see, does not present himself as an opponent of Jesus, but as his collaborator, one who wants his success. Let's see.

“*Then Jesus..*” the passage of the evangelist refers to the baptism in the Spirit, therefore Jesus is full of the Spirit, and the Spirit was given to him because he committed himself to faithfully manifesting the reality of God, “*..was led by the Spirit into the wilderness...*” the wilderness recalls many things, the exodus, the path of liberation, the period of trial and also the place of power, where the bandits, those who wanted to conquest power, gathered, “*..to be tempted by the devil.*” It is to be remembered in the Gospel of Matthew, that the devil, appears only in this one episode.

“*After fasting forty days and forty nights,..*” forty indicates a generation, the evangelist wants to make understood: attention, this that I am now presenting, is not a limited period of the life of Jesus, but the whole of Jesus' life, all his existence, was subjected to these seductions. It is important that the evangelist points out that fasting is forty days and forty nights, to indicate that it is not a religious fasting, which starts at sunrise and ends at sunset, but is a show of strength, because the evangelist wants to show that Jesus is not the same, he is superior to Elijah, to Moses, the others who fasted forty days and forty nights.

The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God..." the tempter does not doubt that Jesus is the son of God - at the moment of baptism there was the proclamation by God: "*This is my son*" - we could translate better to understand better: since you are the son of God, that is, are you the son of God? Then manifest your power, because this is the opposition that is in the gospel: while God is love that is manifested in service, the devil is the power that is manifested in domination. Then this tempter says: since you are the son of God, "... *tell these stones to become bread.*" Meaning use your skills, your power, for yourself. But Jesus answers, and he will answer every time, quoting the word of the Lord: *It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'*" So Jesus expresses his full confidence in the action of the Father, by putting his word into practice, and Jesus, in the course of the Gospel will be seen, not using his ability to feed himself, but he, the son of God, he himself will make bread, food of life, for others.

"Then the devil took him to the holy city..." before the devil the evangelist is anticipating the person who will be protected by the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the doctors of the law, the whole religious institution. The devil does not present himself as an enemy, a rival of God, the sinner, but the devil has his followers in the priestly caste in power, which he wants to dominate. He took him to the holy city and "...*had him stand on the highest point of the temple.*" this devil evidently not only knows the writing, but also knows the apocrypha, because in the book of Ezra, an apocryphal of the time, it is said that the messiah would have manifested himself appearing suddenly on the highest point of the temple in Jerusalem, this is in the fourth book of Ezra. So the devil is a keen connoisseur of writings and everything else.

"If you are the Son of God," he said, ..." again since you are the son of God, the invitation of the devil is the same as that of the high priests, scribes and elders when Jesus is crucified: if you are the son of God, come down from the cross, then manifest your power, "...*throw yourself down. For it is written: He will command his angels concerning you, ...*" that is, he says to him: you are the son of God, do what people expect, people expect you to suddenly appear in the temple, make it spectacular, throw yourself down, then the angels will make you a stairway. And here the devil, as I said perfect connoisseur of the writings, quotes Psalm 91. But Jesus again replies to him *'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'*" it is a whole series of references to episodes from the life of Israel, of the lack of trust.

The third time is not the same as the others: in the first two temptations or seductions, the devil played the messiah or the religious card, now the devil pulls out the ace from his sleeve, he pulls out a card knowing that everyone surrenders to this power, to this charm, the power of wealth. "...*the devil took him to a very high mountain...*" the highest mountain indicates the place where the gods lived, that is, the divine condition, so, the devil offers him the divine condition. Do you want to be the one who conquers the world? Do you want to be the one the people are waiting for? You must have the divine condition, and how can you get this divine condition? Through wealth and power. "...*and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. "All this I will give you," he said..*" he is almost there - and in Luke's gospel (ch 4, 6) it actually says: "...*it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to.*" - the devil is the holder of wealth, power, therefore those who hold wealth and power are not given to them by God, but by the devil. *"All this I will give you,"* but there is a small detail, "...*if you will bow down and worship me.*" So the devil

offers Jesus the divine condition through the worship of power, glory, and success. But, as we said at the beginning, Jesus will respond to this temptation by seeing his tempter, in the figure of Peter, the only disciple to whom Jesus will address calling him Satan, on the mountain of the transfiguration. During the transfiguration Jesus shows that the divine condition is not obtained through the adoration of power, but through the generous gift of himself.

Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan!" the same way that he will address Peter, who will be his Satan in the gospel, therefore Jesus refuses him, *"For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"* it is the danger of idolatry, here is all the reference to the golden calf, to the contamination of Israel with the pagan peoples. *"Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him."* the angels are the collaborators of Jesus there, he obtains the protection of the angels precisely by refusing temptation and seduction. So, they are not temptations to evil, but seductions that Jesus will suffer throughout his life, and by the religious institution, but also by his own disciples.