

1 LENT- 10th March 2019

JESUS...WAS LED BY THE SPIRIT IN THE WILDERNESS FOR FORTY DAYS, BEING TEMPTED BY THE DEVIL - Biblical commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

Link video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ckMvFwzvSto>

Luke 4,1-13

And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.'" And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said to him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." And Jesus answered him, "It is written, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve."

And he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you," and "On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone."

And Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.

On the first Sunday of Lent the liturgy presents us with the Temptations in the Desert, according to the interpretation given by Luke in his gospel in chapter 4.

We read *"And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit,"* it is after the Baptism, after the baptism the Spirit descended on Jesus that converted Jesus into the visible manifestation of forgiveness and the love of God. *"He..returned from the Jordan and was led.. (literally taken) by the Spirit in the wilderness..."* The wilderness or desert recalls the exodus of Israel, when the Egyptian slaves began their journey into the promised land. Now the promised land has been transformed into a land of slavery from which Jesus must release them.

The religious institution, for its own interests and convenience, has seized God and Jesus must free the people from the clutches of these. *"... for forty days,"* Numbers in the gospels, and in the Bible, are never to be interpreted in a mathematical way, but always in a figurative way.

Forty indicates a generation. The evangelist wants to tell us: what I am presenting to you now is not about a single period of Jesus' life, but all of his existence.

"...being tempted by the devil." Here it is right to translate this way. But for us "temptation" always means something that leads us to do evil. None of this. The devil - we will see him - does not present himself as a rival of Jesus, but as one of his collaborators. Then more than temptations we could talk about the devil's seductions in the desert.

"And he ate nothing during those days." It is not a fast. The evangelist avoids the word fasting, because the hunger of Jesus was a different hunger. Later on, Jesus will say: *"I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you....."*(Luke 22,15)

"And when they were ended, he was hungry." But it is not a hunger for bread. Now the devil presents himself. Who is the devil? While God is love that puts himself at the service of men, the devil is power that dominates people.

The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God,..." It is not a question of the divine son, which had already been affirmed in baptism, but means "since you are the son of God, use your abilities to your advantage". *"...command this stone to become bread."* So use your skills to your advantage.

"And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.'" It is a quote from Deuteronomy. We see that the dispute between Jesus and the devil seems to be like a theological dispute between the scribes or the rabbis. The evangelist in fact builds it in this way.

"And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said to him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. This affirmation that Luca attributes to the devil is tremendous. It is not God, but the devil who gives power and wealth. So those who hold power and wealth do not receive it from God, but theirs is a diabolical activity because they receive it from the devil.

It is a very serious denunciation, and is typical of the evangelist Luke.

"If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." So he invites Jesus to a gesture of idolatry, but Jesus also this time, quotes Deuteronomy, *" And Jesus answered him, "It is written, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve."* It is the incompatibility between God and power, between love and service. So Jesus categorically rejects the proposal of the devil, this idolatry of power.

"And he took him to Jerusalem..." The devil seems to know the holy places and the Bible. *"..and set him on the pinnacle of the temple.." why there? Because there was a religious tradition that*

said that nobody knew who the Messiah was. Suddenly, during the festival of the tents, he would have manifested himself on the highest point of the temple. Then the devil invites him to manifest himself by adding a spectacular sign.

"..and said to him, "If you are the Son of God,.." We note that in the first and third temptations, the devil says "since you are the Son of God", for the middle one, that of power and money, he did not need to bother with the divine condition, because it is a temptation to which all men succumb, that of corruption, power and money. But here again "if you are the Son of God", meaning "Because you are the Son of God".

"...throw yourself down from here," that is to give a spectacular sign. And the devil seems to be quite an expert in the scriptures, because, as Jesus countered by quoting sentences from the Book of Deuteronomy, the devil confronts Jesus by quoting Psalm 91, 11. *" For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways."* We see how the devil is an expert, so the evangelist here makes us realize that it is the theological disputes that Jesus had with the rabbis and the scribes, who are the true instruments of the devil. *"On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone."* And Jesus answered him, *"It is said, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'"* Again from the book of Deuteronomy. Jesus asserts full trust in the Father's action without the need to provoke him to make the action arise.

"And when the devil had ended every temptation,.." the verb "to tempt" will then appear again for the action of the doctors of the law. Here are the devils, these defenders of the doctrine in reality the evangelist denounces them as instruments of the devil.

"...he departed from him until an opportune time." When will this opportune time be? From the data we have in the Gospel the fixed moment is the moment of the cross, the tremendous, dramatic moment of the end of Jesus, when the leaders of the people will say to Jesus "If you are the Christ save yourself", using his abilities to save himself.

But Jesus all that he was, all his strength, all his energies, all his abilities he never used them for his own interest, but always for the interest of others. Not for his own convenience, but for the convenience of men; he did not think about his life, but about the lives of others. Here then is the difference between God and the devil: God is love that puts himself at the service and interest of the others in the first place, the devil is power that dominates and thinks only of its own convenience.

Ecco allora la differenza che emerge tra Dio e il diavolo: Dio è amore che si mette a servizio e mette l'interesse dell'altro al primo posto, il diavolo è potere che domina e pensa soltanto alla propria convenienza.