

**JESUS WAS LED BY THE SPIRIT IN THE DESERT ....BEING TEMPTED BY THE DEVIL - Biblical  
Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM**

**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.*

For the first Sunday in lent the reading presents us with the Temptation in the Desert, according to the interpretation given to us in Luke's gospel chapter 4.

Let's read. "*And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit,*" It is after the baptism. After the baptism, the Spirit came to Jesus, converting him in the visible manifestation of forgiveness and the love of God. "*.. (he) returned from the Jordan, and was led (literally "taken") by the Spirit for forty days in the wilderness, ..*" the desert refers to the exodus when Israel began their journey from the Egyptian slavery to enter into the Promised land. Now the Promised Land has changed into a land of slavery from which Jesus must liberate.

The religious institution, for its own interests and convenience, has taken hold of God and Jesus must free the people from their clutches. "*.. for forty days*" Numbers in the gospels, and in the Bible, are not

ever interpreted in an arithmetic or mathematical way, but always figurative. 40 indicates a generation. The evangelist wants to say to us: that which I now present to you does not apply to a single period in Jesus' life, but to all his existence.

*"..tempted by the devil".* This is the right translation. But for us "temptation" always means to induce something bad. Nothing like this. The devil, - and we will see him - does not present himself as a rival for Jesus, but as his collaborator. Therefore, more than temptation we could speak of the seduction of the devil in the wilderness

*"And he ate nothing in those days;"* It is not a fast. The evangelist avoids the word fast, because Jesus' hunger was different. 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."* In fact it is not hunger for bread. Now it is here that the devil presents himself. Who is the devil? While God is love that puts himself to the service of others, the devil is the power that dominates the people

*"The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God,"* There is no doubt of the divine parentage , it was already confirmed at the baptism, but means " as you are the son of God use your capacity to your own advantage." *"..command this stone to become bread."* Therefore, use to your own advantage your own capacity.

*" And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.'"* This is a quote from the book of Deuteronomy. We see that the dispute between Jesus and the devil seems to be a real dispute of the scribes or the Rabbis. The evangelist actually constructs it in this way.

*"And the devil took him up,.." - meaning the condition divine - *".. 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 Luke attributes to the devil is terrible. It is not God, but the devil that gives power and wealth. Therefore, those that have power and wealth do not receive it from God, but their activity is diabolical because they receive it from the devil.

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

*"If you, then, will worship me, it shall all be yours."* So the devil asks for a gesture of idolatry, but Jesus also this time always 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. Therefore Jesus refuses categorically The devil proposal, 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 did he take him there? Because it was, the religious tradition that said that no one knew who the Messiah was. Suddenly, during the tent festival, he would have

manifested himself on the highest pinnacle of the temple. So the devil invites him to show himself in a spectacular way.

*“..and said to him, “If you are the Son of God,..”* Note that in the first and third temptation the devil says “ as you are the son of God” , for the one in the middle, that of power and wealth, there was no need to use the divine condition, because it is a temptation that all men succumb too, that of corruption , power and money. Here again “ if you are the son of God” , meaning “ as you are the son of God”

*“..throw yourself down from here, “* another spectacular sign. Moreover, the devil seems quite expert in the sacred scripture, like Jesus he replies quoting a phrase from the book of Deuteronomy; here is what the devil replies to Jesus quoting psalm 91 *“..for it is written, ‘ He will give his angels charge of you, to guard you,;”*; see how the devil is an expert, therefore the evangelist here let us understand that they are the discussions that Jesus had with the high priests and scribes, that 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 tempt the Lord your God.”* Again from the book of Deuteronomy. Jesus has complete faith in the actions of the Father without needing to provoke him to make spectacular actions.

*” And when the devil had ended every temptation,..”*. The verb “to tempt” will appear again for the actions of the doctors of law. These are the devils, these defenders of the doctrine in reality they are claimed as the instruments of the devil by the evangelist.

*“..he departed from him until an opportune time.”* What is this opportune time? The dates already fixed we have is the moment on the cross, a tremendous moment, dramatic, the end of Jesus, when the leaders of the people will say to Jesus “ If you are the Christ, save yourself”, so use your capacity to save yourself.

But Jesus all that he was, all his strength, his energy and all his capacity has never used it for his own interests, but for the interests of others. Not for his own convenience, but for the convenience of mankind; he did not think of his own life, but the lives of others. Here is the difference that emerges between God and the devil; God is love that is put to serve and put the interests of the others in first place, the devil is power that dominates and thinks only for his own convenience.