

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.”

“And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.” When you pray those words, you’re praying them as the baptized people of God who trust that God does not, nor will he ever tempt you and that the devil has been defeated, and you no longer are a part of his vile kingdom. The confidence to pray all that is seen in the Gospel reading for today when Jesus was tempted by the devil in the wilderness, faithfully did not give into temptation, and gives you this victory he has won.

Temptation comes from three places in your lives: your fallen flesh, the world, and the devil. All three sources are deadly and seek to take you away from Christ, his church, and your salvation. As Christians, you have the victory in Christ, but God still warns you lest you fall prey to these things and perish eternally.

Jesus faced temptation from the devil face to face. Matthew recorded for us, “Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. And the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” But he answered, “It is written, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.””

The first temptation faced by Jesus was toward his flesh. Bellies are good of driving people away from God. This can happen in times of hunger like the Israelites in the wilderness grumbling to God and then not being content when he gave them manna and quail to eat. This temptation can also come in times of plenty. In the minor prophets, some of the leaders of the people feasted enjoying a plentiful life while turning their backs to the Lord. Think also of the story of the rich man and Lazarus. Hungry or full, the temptation that goes after the stomach seeks to lure you away from where true nourishment comes from and who gives it to you.

This is an important thing for you to think about in your lives. Listen to what Jesus says here when he quotes from Deuteronomy, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” That is a true statement to be taken to heart. How often in your life do your fallen flesh, the world (your family and friends), and the devil try to get you to look at the stuff in your life as the bread by which you live and find your nourishment to keep you going? How many things you have around you in your home or things you spend your time doing are tempting you to think that you must do or have these things? Or in times of scarcity or uncertainty how are you tempted to think that God will not provide and take care of you? Ask yourselves those questions and see where you are being drawn into temptation and away from the Lord.

Look at how Jesus, though sees the stones offered to him to be turned into loaves of bread. Learn from what Jesus did. Martin Luther preaches on this saying, “Look at Christ’s attitude toward this temptation of His belly and how He overcame it. He saw nothing but stones and what was inedible, but He went ahead and clung to the Word of God, strengthened Himself, and knocked the devil down with it. All Christians should valiantly make use of this saying when they see that there is lack and scarcity and everything has become stones; when their spirit then fidgets, they should say: ‘What would it be if the whole world were full of bread? Nevertheless, man does not live on bread alone, but still more is required, namely, the Word of God.’ These words are so beautiful and powerful that we must not rush past them, but emphasize them even more.”

For you to live by every word that comes from the mouth of God is live your life by it. It’s to think, live, act, and speak according to what God teaches. That well known collect beautifully sums it with “hear, read, mark, and inwardly digest.” That’s appropriate. And when you face temptations like this and others, having been fed on God’s word you see these things for what they are, nothing that will give you true nourishment. When you are tempted to find your life in the stones of the world remember and confess those words which Jesus teaches you “For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?”

This all isn't to say you don't neglect bread and not take care of others. You pray to God, "give us this day our daily bread" and God provides. He uses you and others for this purpose to give daily bread to you and your family. This is still living by what comes from the mouth of God, his word. What it is not, however, is trying to turn what God has not given into something he has or doubting the Lord to take care of you. It's living by his word and knowing what the Lord does, how he does it, and giving him thanks for what he gives however little or much this may be and being content finding rest in the Lord who is the giver, the very Bread of Life.

This first temptation, and the others keep you coming back to God's word. God's word combats temptation and overcomes it because Christ has overcome temptation. The word of God matters, and the devil knows this as he tempted Jesus and tempts you. Likewise, so does your fallen flesh and the world. Rationalizing sin uses words be they spoken out loud or in the mind to try and think you or someone else can have the final say over and above what God really says.

The word of God teaches you, gives you the victory, and is your defense against the devil and temptation. If you are not living by every word that comes from the mouth of God, you are in a world of hurts when it comes to trying to go through this life. Soon you start looking at stones and think they are finest bread. You start viewing the things around you in ways that think they are more important than God's word and soon the day comes when you forget God's word, then you stop caring about God's word, and finally you don't believe God's word. On that day the devil rejoices.

You want to guarantee your children and loved ones will fall into temptation then don't follow the example of Jesus. You want to stress out about your job, what you will eat, wear, your health, or any everything else then don't be surprised when you the devil entices you away from trusting in Jesus.

Don't read Bible daily with your family, don't pray together, and don't talk about the things of God in your homes then don't be surprised when you or your kids face temptation, and they walked into battle not armed with the sword of the spirit but unarmed and unprotected and with a big bullseye painted across their foreheads. Or don't be surprised if when they face the battle, they don't even fight but instead walk willingly to the enemy's ranks and dress themselves in the uniform of the evil foe.

You see it's not that complicated when it comes to things pertaining to facing temptation in this life. It's not. The hard thing, or rather the unpleasant thing, is that much of the time it's humbling yourself and admitting that things in your life need to be evaluated and if they are contradicting or getting in the way of Christ, his word, and his church, then some serious change needs to occur.

The second temptation, it could be said, is a temptation to test God. "Then the devil took him [Jesus] to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, "'He will command his angels concerning you,' and "'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" This happens in your lives when you abuse God's grace or try to manipulate his word to serve your purposes, lifestyles, and beliefs. The devil tries to get a heart which trust God to believe what God has not commanded, or God does not want his child to believe.

When you face temptation to sin against God, your fallen flesh, the world, or the devil like to say, "It's alright, nobody's perfect" or "God will forgive you if you go ahead and do this. Go ahead and live your life, follow your heart, wouldn't God want you to be happy." Your defense against all of this is God's word and throwing back in the unholy trinity's face your baptism where you were set free from sin, forgiven, and given a new life in Christ. You cry out, "Lord, have mercy upon me a sinner."

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The last temptation encapsulates them all. “Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” Then Jesus said to him, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written, ““You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.”” All temptations go back to this and the evil foe from which they originate just as all the commandments come back to the first, “you shall have no other gods.”

1 John 3 warns you bluntly about all of this when God inspired St. John to write, “Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God.”

When the devil tries to lure you into sin and away from God, Jesus teaches you to pray “deliver us from evil” because your prayer is against Satan and his works and ways. In the Large Catechism Luther sums up nicely, “So the entire substance of all our prayer is directed against our chief enemy. For it is he who hinders among us everything that we pray for: God’s name or honor, God’s kingdom and will, our daily bread, a cheerful good conscience, and so forth.” Living in God’s word, finding your life in it and through it, and clinging to the Lord through his word as all times sends the devil fleeing. Know who your enemy is and don’t be fooled by his lies when you face them in your life. See through them and tell him, “Be gone Satan!” as you hold before him Christ and his word. One little word can fell the devil and that word is “Christ” who has redeemed you.

Dear people of God, temptation is very real and very deadly. Be wise as Christians in this world who know the dangers of your fallen flesh, the world, and the devil. As a baptized child of God, you have a target placed on you because you belong to Christ. You will face temptations in this life. They won’t always be the same for every person and some will be more overt than others. This is why you have to be prepared, and God is the one who prepares you. You must be hearing God’s word and receiving his supper regularly. When you don’t you are like a soldier standing on a battlefield without any weapons while a plane drops a nuclear bomb on your head. You can’t overcome temptations on your own. You will fail every single time. Know the danger and see it in all its deadly snares. They will take you away from Christ and into hell forever.

Here’s the thing, though, that’s comforting in all of this and what you see before you today. See Jesus and his faithfulness. See him who knew no sin and was incapable of sinning. He stood face to face with the devil and silenced the devil with the word of God. Jesus was obedient completely to God’s law in all that he thought, said, and did. He is the Son of God and will always win the day. He is the King who did not and could not fail. He did this wonderfully and it was all done for you. And all those times you have given into temptation and all of your sin who took upon himself and died on the cross to pay the price you owe for your sin. This victory and atonement then are yours and covers you in the waters of your baptism. You have it all given to you and you stand at peace with God.

As a Christian this is who you are when you face temptation. You face it as one who is covered with Christ. Hearing this reading today and seeing it in faith you behold your victory over these things. The Epistle reading from Hebrews proclaims the confidence you have in Christ and where you find help as you face temptation. “Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

You, dear saint of God, have the victory over sin, death, and the devil as Jesus lived, died, and was raised again all for you. He is your “mighty fortress” in life as you walk in danger through this world. Repent of your sin and when you face temptation look to Jesus who has endured the assaults of the devil and overcome them. Tell the devil to go where he belongs and don’t even entertain one letter of his lies. Know that you have the victory to turn the other way because

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you are no longer a slave to sin but a new creation in Christ. When you fail, and you will, confess your sin and repent. Jesus is the propitiation for you sin and his forgives you by his blood. Be a constant hearer of God's word finding your confidence in Christ. Have peace, rest, and a good conscience in Jesus crucified for you to lay down your head each night knowing that you deserve death and hell, but he has saved you by his grace alone and on account of him you are forgiven and stand righteous before the throne of God. He sends his holy angels to watch over and guard you even as they ministered to Jesus after the devil left him. The Lord has given you the victory and has saved you by his blood.

Rejoice this first Sunday in Lent. The Most High is your refuge. He is your dwelling place, “no evil shall be allowed to befall you, no plague come near your tent.” What joy to behold the Lord Jesus who has done this for you. What a forgiveness to have as the Lord covers you with his blood in holy baptism and feeds you with the eternal bread and medicine of immortality in his holy supper. What a victory to have over sin, the devil, and even death because Christ is for you. God does not lead you into temptation and delivers you from evil. The day is coming when all sin, temptation, the attacks of the devil, and death will come to end. On that day you will no longer walk in danger but walk in your raised bodies with the Lord not in the desert but the eternal Jerusalem and new creation he will make. It will be a glorious day where there will be bread and choice wine flowing in abundance and eternal joy and glory beyond compare. Lift up your heads and know what you have and what awaits you. “When he calls to me, I will answer him; I will rescue him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation.”

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