

1st Sunday of Lent

Homily: Fr. Shijo George

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Temptations, temptations and temptations. The Three Temptations that Jesus faced at the summit of his period of rigorous prayer and fasting in the wilderness: while Jesus was praying and fasting, Satan prepared to open the door for him, and us, to sin and fall. There is a Spanish proverb: "... where God builds a church, the Devil will build a chapel." This refers to the way that evil will always find a means to corrupt and infiltrate even the best of enterprises and intentions. Thus, temptations can happen to anyone at any time because it happened even to Jesus.

I read a very interesting and famous biblical interpretation of this Three Temptations of Jesus by Bishop Fulton J Sheen.

During his life, Bishop Sheen often argued that what the world needs most is holiness; holiness that comes from the Cross. In the desert, the devil attempted to lure Christ away from the Cross with promises of providing an easier way. "The essence of the demonic, from a biblical point of view, is hatred of the Cross," Bishop Sheen explained, "and the temptations offered three shortcuts from the Cross."

The First Temptation was to turn stones into bread. Well into his fasting, Jesus was hungry. Being also a social reformer, Sheen explained, by turning stones into bread, this offered a way to give bread to the masses while satisfying his own hunger. "Jesus rejected it as one who says, 'I reject any plan which promises to make men richer without making them holier.'"

The Second Temptation followed: "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, 'He will command his Angels concerning you, to protect you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"

Bishop Sheen explained that this Second Temptation was to replace the humiliation of the Cross with a display of might and power. "Our Lord might say, 'you repeat this temptation whenever you admire the wonders of science and forget that I am the Author of the Universe and its science. ... I refuse to perform stunts to win them, for they would not really be won that way. It is only when I am seen on the Cross that I really draw men to Myself; it is by sacrifice and not by marvels that I must make My Appeal.'"

For the Third and final Temptation, the devil showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and offered to give him command over them if Christ would fall and worship him.

"It's the temptation of co-existence of good and evil," Sheen revealed. "Find a quicker easier way. The kingdom Satan offered was the world, not the spirit, and to serve the world is slavery. Jesus came to conquer hearts first, then the world follows."



Bishop Sheen warned in his writing that our enemy today is the spirit of the world that pressures us to conform, lest we become branded and labelled. “We have to go into the world but not to be worldly.”

What helped Jesus to fight against Satan was his self-awareness and self-control. He was conscious of His mission, and the redemptive and salvific outcome that was going to result from his sacrifice on the Cross.

So, like Jesus, let us fight against the temptations of our own life. It is a relentless, daily battle against Satan. The two attitudes of Jesus will help us to fight against evil and its temptations: one, to become aware of who we are. This self-awareness of who we are is to know that we are children of God. The second is to fulfill our mission with self-control. What is our Mission? To proclaim the Gospel and to become an active living example of the Gospel through the way we live our life, in whatever we do and wherever we are.

I would like to conclude with a famous quote from the ever-famous Viktor Frankl, from his book *Man's Search for Meaning*

“We watched and witnessed some of our comrades behave like swine while others behaved like saints. Man has both potentialities within himself. Which one is actualized depends on decisions, but not on conditions.”

(Frankl, Viktor 1946, *Ein Psychologe erlebt das Konzentrationslager*)