

1 Lent C 2019 SML
LK 4:1-13

Just prior to the temptation narrative read in this evening's (morning's) gospel, Luke clearly told his readers on two occasions that Jesus is Son of God: the first time was at His Baptism, when the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form as a dove and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son," (LK 3:22) and a second time was in the genealogy of Jesus, "the son of Adam, the son of God." (LK 3:38)

The temptation narrative further identified Jesus as not only the Son of God, but as a man, a man like us in all things but sin. Understandably then, Jesus dealt with temptation. And the temptation narrative in Luke's gospel is a masterpiece.

Citing what is different about Luke's presentation of the temptation is noteworthy. While Matthew takes Jesus from Jerusalem and then to the mountain, Luke takes Jesus first to the mountain and then to Jerusalem for one simple reason. Only Luke's temptation narrative ends with the verse, "When the devil had finished every temptation, he departed from him for a time." A more literal translation reads, "he departed from him for a more opportune time," and that opportunity presented itself

three times in Jerusalem during the passion and again, three more times on the cross.

Of the synoptic gospels Matthew, Mark and Luke, only Luke credited Satan with the threefold opportunity: the betrayal of Judas, the denials of Simon Peter and the arrest by the chief priests and officers of the temple.

Then **Satan** entered into Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve; he went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray Jesus. (LK 22:3)

"Simon, Simon, behold, **Satan** demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." (LK 22:31)

Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, **the hour of darkness (that is, the hour of Satan)**." (LK 22:53)

As our Blessed Lord was tempted three times in the desert, He was tempted three times in Jerusalem during the passion, and He was tempted three times on the cross:

The people stood by and watched; the rulers, meanwhile, sneered at him and said, "He saved others, let him save

himself if he is the chosen one, the Messiah of God." (LK 23:35)

Even the soldiers jeered at him. As they approached to offer him wine they called out, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself." (LK 23:37)

Now one of the criminals hanging there reviled Jesus, saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Then save yourself and us." (LK 23:39)

It becomes obvious from Luke's presentation that temptation was not just a one day bout with the devil after 40 days in the desert, but a recurring battle for Jesus. And if we believe that Our Blessed Lord was a man like us in all things but sin, then temptation struck the very core of His being just as temptation, despite its many forms, does to you and to me.

But the fact that Jesus was a man like us in all things but sin presented Jesus with one further difficulty. Noted theologian Marilyn Monroe once said, "There was never a temptation I didn't give in to." Experience shows that giving in to temptation by sinning alleviates the strength of the temptation for a period of time. Since Jesus was incapable of sin, temptation was obviously never alleviated for Him. Temptation was something that never left Him alone, but constantly knawled at Him.

A recurring battle that many of us suffer from, myself included, is what I call “stinking thinking.” Stinking thinking is the constant knowling of past sins, sins that were confessed, or we can’t remember if we confessed them, but they come back to haunt. The older we get, the more common this type of stinking thinking. I’ve heard this more times than once in confession. “Father, I want to confess a sin from my youth. I’ll then hear. I’ve confessed this sin before, or I’m not sure if I ever confessed this sin, but it haunts me.”

Yesterday, this very scenario happened in my confessional. A woman confessed a sin she committed 11 years ago. I knew I’d be preaching about this very topic, sins that haunt from the past. So I asked if she was a member of the parish. She said she was from a neighboring parish. Why? I told her I would have asked her to attend one of my Masses this weekend so she could hear this homily. She asked, “Father how bad are your homilies that you hand them out for a penance?”

My advice to those haunted by the knowling of a past sin is always the same. “You listen to me. The only one who is delighting in this stinking thinking is the Devil and do not give the devil his due. If this sin was confessed, it was forgiven. If you forgot to confess this sin, it was forgiven at your last confession

because absolution forgives sins confessed and forgotten. So be done with this sin. And if memory of this sin returns to you, put it out of your mind because it's gone. Today is the last time you ever need to make mention of this sin. You will never need to mention it again."

It's the First Sunday of Lent. For the next 40 days, the Church will ready herself to remember the passion, death of our Blessed Lord, events that were entirely earth shattering; literally earthshattering says Matthew, as Matthew recorded an earthquake moments after the crucifixion.

In Jesus' passion and death, there were no "winners." No one comes off looking "good," except Jesus. The Jewish leaders of Jesus' day merely did what any of us would have done, and still do. John hit the nail right on the head when he wrote:

"Many, even among the Jewish authorities, believed in him, but because of the Pharisees they did not acknowledge it openly in order not to be expelled from synagogue. For they preferred human praise to the glory of God." JN 12:42-43

They protected their perceived "place," their sense of safety and security, and the satisfaction of their own "rightness."

Everyone failed. Caiphus judged. Peter denied. Judas betrayed. Mark ran away. Pilate equivocated. The crowd mocked. The soldiers laughed. The centurion pierced the Sacred Heart with a lance. And as Jesus fixed them with a glance, says Luke, they still turn away. The Jews, the Romans, His friends - they all fell. And so do we.

So take advantage of the sacrament of penance this Lent. Jesus stands ready in every confessional with the same words he spoke from the Cross, recorded only in Luke's gospel. "Father, forgive them." And help us to use the sacramental grace from confession because I know I can overcome temptation. I have overcome temptation. But for the times I choose not to, forgive me Lord. For the times I let the stinking thinking take away my inner peace, forgive me Lord, so as not give the devil his due.