

For it is Written

The gospel for this coming Sunday (First Sunday in Lent) is Matthew 4:1-11. This is the story of Jesus' temptation.

The Holy Spirit, whom Jesus received at His Baptism (3:16), at once led Him to be tested. These temptations were not willed by the devil but by God, whose eternal plan called for the Savior to be tempted and to triumph. Jesus met the test as Israel had not (Ex 15:25; 20:20). As true man, Jesus experienced genuine temptation. As true God, He could overcome temptation.

In Judea the desert was a place associated with demons (cf. 12:43). Forty days and forty nights recalls the experiences of Moses (Ex 24:18; 34:28) and Elijah (1Ki 19:8), as well as the 40 years of Israel's temptation (testing) in the desert (Dt 8:2-3).

Satan receives three different names in the account of Jesus' temptation. He is "the slanderer," in 4:1, 5, 8, 11. In 4:3 he is "the tempter," and in 4:10 Jesus addresses him as "Adversary." In our lives he is all of these.

We can learn much about the devil's approach when he tempts us. He tries to create doubt, appeal to our physical needs, miss-lead us, even miss-quoting Scripture and appealing to our vanity.

The significance of Jesus' temptations, especially because they occurred at the outset of his public ministry, seems best understood in terms of the kind of Messiah he was to be. He would not accomplish his mission by using his supernatural power for his own needs (first temptation), by using his power to win a large following by miracles or magic (second temptation) or by compromising with Satan (third temptation). Jesus had no inward desire or inclination to sin, for these in themselves are sin (Mt 5:22, 28). Because he was God he did not sin in any way, whether by actions or word or inner desire (2Co 5:21; Heb 7:26; 1Pe 2:22; 1Jn 3:5). Yet Jesus' temptation was real, not merely symbolic. He was "tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin" (Heb 4:15). He was confronted by the tempter with a real opportunity to sin. Although Jesus was the Son of God, he defeated Satan by using a weapon that everyone has at his disposal: the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (Eph 6:17). He met all three temptations with Scriptural truth (vv. 4, 7, 10) from Deuteronomy.

We have that powerful Word as well. Luther reminds us of that power when says in his Mighty Fortress "one little Word can fell him." What's more, when we fail in our resistance, he is there to clean us up from our mire and continues to walk beside us in our earthly wanderings.

Prayer: Mighty Hero, though devils fill the world, we do not fear because you have won the victory.
Amen. (TLSB)