

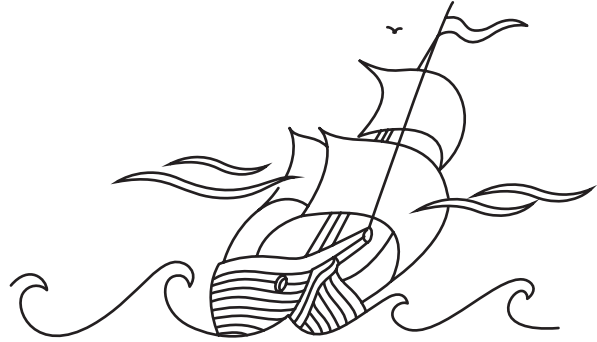
March 2020

Lead us not into temptations

Mathew 6:13

Reflection

After His baptism in the river Jordan, the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Though He was truly God, He was also truly man as well for whom temptations were a reality He faced throughout His life. But unlike us, the temptations could not wean His heart away from His bonding with the Father. His heart was set on eternal truths. Even so, Jesus empathises with humanity and declares that temptation is an essential part of our spiritual journey (Mt. 18:7).



It is not what is outside of us, but “what comes out of a person that defiles him”, says Jesus. “For it is from within, out of a person’s heart, that evil thoughts come” (Mk. 7:20-23). The sin within one’s own heart attracts the evil outside. When a suitable temptation appears on the horizons of our thoughts, the hidden sin unveils itself in response. Since our mind and body are not united with God, we succumb to the temporary pleasures that temptation offers. Judas Iscariot walked closely with the Master for three years. Yet he harboured a weakness which perhaps he himself was unaware of – attachment to money (Jn. 12:6). It was this dependence on money that made him choose the thirty pieces of silver that the high priest dangled in front of him over his beloved Master (Mt. 26:14,15). If Judas had not secretly idolised money in his heart, the temptation of the silver coins would not have been the enticement it proved to be. Jesus says, “nothing that enters a person from outside can defile him, for it does not enter a man’s heart”.

How can we benefit from temptations? The Catechism teaches us thus, quoting the early father of the church, Origen: “There is a certain usefulness to temptation. No one but God knows what our soul has received from Him, not even ourselves. But temptation reveals it in order to teach us to know ourselves, and in this way, we discover our evil inclinations and are obliged to give thanks for the things that temptation has revealed” (CCC. 2847). Temptations are like strong winds that lash against a sailboat. Just as a skilled captain harnesses it to reach his destination, we should also learn to harness temptations for our greater good. Echoing this truth, St. Augustine prays, “May God and his mercy grant that we are shaken every day, or tempted or tested or tried, in order that we may make some progress.”

We should be responsible for the unnecessary desires we foster within ourselves and acknowledge that these very traits within us make us vulnerable to temptations, and not something outside of us. This realisation can be both powerful and humbling at the same time. It leads us to rely more on God. He allows temptations in our lives so that we are made aware of our weakness, thus increasing our dependence on God, while aspiring for a life of holiness. Maintaining this spirit of humility is the key, as testified by Mary in her Magnificat: “He ... has lifted up the humble”.

Mother Mary, through her humility and total surrender to God’s will and dependence on His grace, is the finest example of a life of purity and holiness that effortlessly resisted temptations. Her eyes were focused on the Father and His will. For Jesus too, temptations were occasions to re-orient Himself to His mission. Prayer and the Word of God became His path to holiness. How much more then, should it be our path as well.

When temptations try to establish dominion in our lives, let us earnestly pray: Our Father in heaven... lead us not into temptation, deliver us from all evil, particularly the evil inclinations within us.

