

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

“Temptations to sin are sure to come,” Jesus says (Luke 17:1). We should expect them. Part of what it means to be fallen man is that we feel the urge of the devil to sin. Our Augsburg Confession reminds us that since the fall of Adam all men who “are born in the natural way” are not only “conceived and born in sin,” but also with “concupiscence,” a lust not just in a sexual way but a desire to sin in general (AC, II:1). The devil uses that urge to his advantage as he tempts us, and the fact is, we often succumb to his temptations.

In today's Gospel, Jesus also felt the devil's urging to sin. Thanks be to God, Jesus did not fall prey to the devil's wiles. Nevertheless, temptations to sin are exactly what you would expect if Jesus truly is our brother, partaking of the same flesh and blood as the rest of mankind (Heb. 2:11, 14), if Jesus truly is to be our substitute and *“fulfill all righteousness”* for us. For ever since the devil's treachery in the garden and Adam's fall, all mankind has been subjected to the guile of the devil and are tempted to sin.

Jesus didn't just seem to be man; He was true man; His flesh received from His mother Mary. Jesus didn't just pretend to be tempted; He was tempted ... that we heard today in the Gospel; but Scripture also says that He was *“one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin”* (Heb. 4:15). For even though Jesus was God's own Son and true God, yet He came in the weakness of our flesh; and so His temptations were real, not feigned; as Scripture says, *“he himself ... suffered when tempted”* (Heb. 2:18). Yet Jesus did not succumb to them; Jesus *“knew no sin”* (2 Cor. 5:21).

Strikingly, it was God's will that Jesus be tested. The devil didn't lure Jesus out into the wilderness; He was led there by the Spirit Himself, alone in the wilderness, *“in order to be tempted.”* And the devil was happy to oblige. What a victory that would have been, had the devil succeeded!

Therefore, the devil held nothing back in his attempts to loosen Jesus' hold on righteousness. He used then some of what he still uses today—fleshly desires for one, for Matthew reports that Jesus had fasted 40 days and 40 nights, and he writes simply that Jesus was hungry. It seems such an understatement. Therefore, the tempter, as the devil is called in the text, tried to use Jesus' hunger to get Him to turn His attention on Himself and relieve His own suffering.

Surely one couldn't fault Jesus for using His power to turn the stones into bread. It seems logical to take care of oneself first, right? Flight attendants instruct us to put our oxygen masks on first before we help others with us. Besides, who would know? But that would have taken Jesus' focus off of His purpose. The Son of Man did not come to be served by others, nor did He come to serve Himself. He

came to serve us by giving His life as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world (Matt. 20:28).

The tempter's ways are little different in our day. He still uses our weak flesh, and he knows that solitude is one of his best tools. Online predators use this same technique. They separate our youth from family and trusted teachers, and they become easy prey. The devil uses it also to separate us from the Shepherd's flock. Then, how easy it is for us to be tempted into all sorts of sins, chief among them are "false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice" (Small Catechism, Lord's Prayer, 6th Petition). We may think, "who will know?" "Who will care?" But the Father knows; He knows what is done even in secret (Matt. 6:4, 6, 18). And He knows when His sheep are missing. Therefore, the Scripture calls us to seek out the lost sheep; and it reminds us not to forsake the gathering together (Heb. 10:25). It's why Luther urges us to faithfulness to the Gospel, which "gives us counsel and aid against sin." And he reminds us of the help that comes from the "mutual conversation and consolation of the brethren" (Smalcald Articles, Part 3, Article IV).

The devil also tempted Jesus by His deceitful ways. Devil, itself means "*slanderer*." And so the devil does. He slanders God as He falsely quotes God's word, leaving out parts as it suits him and twisting the meaning to his own purpose. Yes, "*he will command his angels concerning you.*" That promise is straight out of Scripture. But the devil skips over the purpose for the angels' watchful eye. It was not so that Jesus might put the Lord to the test by throwing Himself down off the temple. Rather, He commands the angels, "*To guard you in all your ways.*" Jesus reminds us that the devil is "*a liar and the father of lies*" (John 8:44), and the devil's omission was a form of lying.

Indeed, as brazen as the serpent was in the garden, directly contradicting God, so he is today. Recall that right after the Lord had told Adam, "*[o]n the day that you eat [the fruit of the forbidden tree], you shall surely die,*" the devil said, "*You will not surely die.*" Adam and Eve listened to the serpent and began to question God's word.

Today the devil brazenly contradicts God's word in a variety of ways. For example, in our religiously pluralistic world, questioning salvation that is exclusively in Jesus. It has been almost three decades ago, but you might recall when Oprah challenged a woman in her audience who claimed that "Jesus is the only way to God." Oprah responded to her: "There couldn't possibly be only one way!" And then later, "there are many paths to what you call God" (Steve Rabey, "Canadian author a key guru in 'Church of Oprah,'" canadianchristianity.com, May 1, 2008). It is as if the serpent was speaking through her.

This is surely one of the false beliefs that Luther was talking about. Scripture is clear. There are not many paths of salvation; there is one gate and one road, according to Jesus: *“Enter by the narrow gate,”* He says. *“For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few”* (Matt. 7:13-14). Again, Jesus told Thomas, *“No one comes to the Father except through me”* (John 14:6); and Peter preached, *“there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved”* (Acts 4:12).

Thus, as Jesus demonstrated, we should not let our solitude or our hunger or our lusts or our modern sensibilities determine the right path. We should listen to the Word of God, which lightens our path, and we should seek to follow in the way of Him who is the Way and the Truth and the Life.

Satan had one more trick up his sleeve. Satan, mankind's adversary, was seeking to get Jesus to worship him rather than the one true God, deflecting Jesus from the purpose for which He was sent. We hear the same trick used as Jesus hung from the cross: *“You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross”* (Matt. 27:40). Had Satan been successful and wooed Jesus down from His cross, in one fell swoop again, all the world would have become his. But Jesus would not be deterred. Again wielding the word of God He warded off this wily foe, this time who skulked away with his tail between his legs.

But he is relentless, and because of him, our path as Christians can also be difficult. Satan would like nothing better than to move us to indulge our flesh, to take the easy way, and so to avoid the cross that we are called to bear as we follow Jesus. Resist him, St. Peter says. This adversary like a roaring lion seeks to separate us from the church and kill us and devour us (1 Pet. 5:8). Satan is a murderer—he was from the beginning (John 8:44). He brought death unto Adam because of his sin, and we also die because of the same.

But thanks be to God for Jesus, true man, who won this wilderness battle, but especially who won the ultimate victory over Satan for you. Thanks be to God for His suffering for you, for the temptations He withstood for you, for the sinless life He lived for you, for the poverty He endured for you, for the agony and bloody sweat He persevered for you, for the cross and Passion He bore for you, for the death and grave He experienced for you—to ransom you from Satan's clutches. And all this so that we, who were born enemies of God, might be made by Christ's death His friends, so that we who were born dead in our sins and trespasses might be made alive in Christ Jesus who rose for you; for in Christ Jesus neither sin nor death has any power over you. The victory is yours through Christ Jesus.

So, be strong in the Lord, dear saints, and in the strength of His might. Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. Resist him, full of faith. Wield “*the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*” (Eph. 6:17). Put on truth and righteousness and the gospel of peace. Remember your baptisms. Eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ for your life. And pray, for temptations are sure to come. Therefore, pray, “Lead us not into temptation,” that is, pray “that God would guard and keep [you] so that the devil, the world, and [your] sinful nature may not deceive [you] or mislead [you] into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice. Although we are attacked by these things, we pray that we may finally overcome them and win the victory” (Small Catechism, Lord’s Prayer, 6th Petition).

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.