

Talk 2. Jesus was led by the Spirit

The Spiritual Journey of Jesus: Our Spiritual Journey Too

Baptism – Temptations – Public Ministry – Led by the Spirit

Baptism

LIKE THE PARABLES, it is important to look at the context of the temptations of Jesus to understand them better. Jesus was tempted **immediately after his baptism and before He began his public ministry.**

A question arises for me: **why did the Spirit lead Jesus into the desert?**

When Jesus emerged from the water after John baptized him, “a voice came from the heavens, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.

At once the Spirit drove him out into the desert, and he remained in the desert for forty days, tempted by Satan.” (Mark 1:11-12)

Temptations

According to William Barclay, in the bible, God TESTS PEOPLE THAT He has especially chosen for a special mission. God tested Abraham when He asked him to sacrifice his son Isaac. In the Gospel, God the Father is preparing, testing and training His Son for what lay ahead of Him.²

I think that most of us, **when we think on temptation**, we immediately think of the **devil as an evil spirit trying to get us to do something wrong**; to undercut God's plan for us. Therefore, the devil must be resisted, **without any lessons learned**.

This idea of an evil one who seduces people into activities that go against God's will is present in the temptations of Jesus.

However, surprisingly, at least it was to me, “**there is another tradition** which portrays the devil as **an agent of God's purposes, as a divinely assigned tester, trainer**. He works in league, **in alliance with God to uncover what is in person's heart and who that person really is**.

THIS TESTING TRADITION helps us to understand **why Jesus was led by the Spirit** into the wilderness in order to be tempted.

Temptations meant to weaken us and temptations meant to make us emerge stronger from the ordeal, come together in the desert. **So, we see here the tested but proven heart of Jesus as he rejects Satan's temptations.”** ³

The devil tries to seduce Jesus into thinking that what it means to be **God's Son is to be physically full, physically safe, and politically powerful.**

The Spirit led him into the desert, but after that the devil chose the settings. **Only after the third temptation does Jesus muster the muscle** to banish him, "**Away with you, Satan!**" He is finally in charge.

All of us face such temptations in various ways in our own lives. In the midst of temptation, **we often feel we are being pulled along too quickly.** **Being forced to make a quick decision is now a red flag for me.**

Some time ago I got a phone call telling me that the utility company had not gotten our latest payment due. **So, I was given just 30 minutes to buy a gift card with cash or our electricity would be turned off.** Because, we did not have enough cash in the house, I asked for more time. Then a friend just said; "**Fr. Michael that sounds like a scam!**" I was shocked, not with my friend, but with myself.

I almost fell for this scam after falling for a scam years ago. In my panic, all I was thinking of was what would happen if I did not follow the urgent promptings of the tempter. That experience and the advice of Evie, have taught me that **if I am being rushed or pushed**, I should take time out to think.

With temptations, **we are not given time to think it through**, to consult, and to see all the implications. This is because speed and pressure are essential features of the temptation. The temptation conveys, "**You have to do this now, and if you don't, the consequences will be serious.**"

The tempter was saying to Jesus: "**You have gone without food for forty days, you need food and you need it now.**"

The tempter says **to a person fighting a drink problem**: "You have had a very hard day! What harm will another drink do you?"

The tempter says **to the gambler**: "This could be your big chance to win. Don't miss it."

When we look back, we say **we have been led astray**, and that is so accurate. **We went along because we could not apply the brakes.** We were no longer in control. **The tempter had the upper hand.**

And then we ask ourselves: "**How did I get into this, anyway?**" "**What was I thinking of?**" The hard facts are that I was **not thinking.**

In the time of temptations, we should slow down, apply the brakes and then consider:

- If I **give into** this temptation, **how bad will I feel** about myself afterwards?
- If I **do not give into** this temptation, **how much better will I feel** about myself afterwards?

“In general, a temptation is a suggested course of action that is not in our best interests or in the best interests of others. In the face of it, we are forced to decide, often rather quickly. It is as if we are standing on the edge of a cliff. We either fall in weakness or step backward much stronger.

Of course, there are different levels of temptations. Looking up and finding the dessert cart has returned to your table is not in the same category as your boss in the accounting firm suggesting you cook the books or be fired for incompetence.

We can laugh about the extra chocolate mousse, but the stakes are higher in terms of **personal integrity and consequences** when the temptations are **legally criminal.**

However, there is a way in which all temptations, minor and major, include the question of identity, the sense of who we are.”⁴

“Who am I?” I once saw in a church the following question: **“Who am I when no one is looking?” “Who am I when I think I am alone?”**

“Who am I?”

It is worth noting that Satan’s temptations are clearly directed to Jesus’ identity. The tempter starts two of his three temptations with, "IF YOU ARE THE SON OF GOD."

Then he indicates behaviors that are fitting to this **"Son of God" status.**

But, these temptations by Satan are based on Satan's false understanding of who Jesus is. Jesus is and will demonstrate that He is the Son of God. He knows it and is always obedient to God the Father.

In our temptations, we too need to know, to remember our spiritual status.
We are sons and daughters of God the Father.

When we **do not know who we are**, we enter more easily into the temptation.

When **we do know, really know**, who we are, we can reach for the resources to resist temptation.

However, knowing who you are and remembering it is not an easy feat. Sometimes we need to be reminded.

John Shea, a very creative **writer** and theologian, writes: "In a movie I saw so long ago that I have forgotten the title, a young man is leaving Greenwich Village to make his fortune in Hollywood. As he is walking away from his two-flat home with luggage in each hand, his mother opens the window and yells to him this parting advice, "**Remember, your grandmother snuck over the Russian border in a hay wagon.**" She is afraid that in the foreign territory of Hollywood he will forget who he is and succumb to temptation. She thinks this memory of his grandmother will keep him on the straight and narrow. Who knows?"⁵

Recalling the responses of Jesus should help us to respond to temptations.

“We do not live on bread alone but on every word, that came forth from the mouth of God. “Get away from me Satan!”

Where do we get this strength from?

John Shea: “So, my suggestion in the face of all questionable offerings is to slow things down. It must be a process.... **a consideration of who we are as sons and daughters of God**—and what understandings and actions are appropriate to this truth about us. ... And do not decide until you know who is deciding. The best way to say **NO** is to be in touch with a stronger **YES.**”⁶

Jesus’ Journey - Deepening Spiritual Knowledge

As we have seen after his baptism, **Jesus had a deep spiritual experience.** He was claimed by God as His Beloved Son and he was filled with **God's Spirit.**

This Spirit then drove Jesus into the desert to be tempted by the evil one on many levels but He refused, each time quoting sacred scripture.

His powerful "No" allowed the Spirit to fill him more completely. So, it is **"filled with the power of the Spirit"** that he returns to Galilee to begin his public ministry.⁷

“When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.” (Luke 4:16-21)

They were words of inauguration. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.”

The Spirit is the “glue”, the common factor in Jesus’ **baptism, temptations** and **now in the public ministry he is about to begin.**

Our Spiritual Journey

PREPARING THIS REFLECTION on Jesus’ baptism, followed by his Temptations in the desert, leading on to his first public message, brought back memories of the days leading up to my own ordination.

Immediately before our ordinations, our class had a week-long retreat in a retreat house **in a remote location.**

In a way, the week should have been a time of joy but no, it was not for me anyway! **It was filled with questions, doubts and temptations.** I wondered if this was really what God wanted me to do. What if I were supposed to do something else with my life? Was I good enough? What about my sins of the past?"

Fortunately, I somehow recalled that we have been warned of such temptations before we went into our “desert”. And our spiritual director was with us to guide us through those trying times.

I now think that temptations may be a sign that a person is about to make an important decision, an important discovering, a spiritual awakening.

SPIRITUAL experiences involve a **change of consciousness** in which we recognize we are **truly living in the presence of God.**

These experiences may be triggered by baptism for adults, attendance at Mass, private prayer time at home, a sunrise or sunset, the changing of seasons, by the death of a parent, by the birth of a child, by working with the poor or oppressed.

In and through these events and activities, **God's love can break into our consciousness and takes hold of us.**

But this deep awareness can often be so important that we must be very careful.

“**After that moment of confirmation**, Satan attempted to trap Jesus in an experience that is often described today as the **Matterhorn Syndrome**. In **Switzerland**, there's a **cemetery** at the **base of the Matterhorn** filled primarily with bodies of climbers who died on **this fourteen-thousand-foot** mountain in the Alps. But strangely enough, **the majority of those buried there were casualties on their way down the mountain**—not on their way up. Having achieved their goal of reaching the top, **they let down their guard** and became careless in their descent.

Satan deviously chose to tempt Jesus after He had experienced one of **His greatest moments while on this earth—the verbal declaration of His Father’s pleasure in Him**—which is what we might call a **mountaintop experience**. It was a time to watch out for the Matterhorn Syndrome.”¹

BUT JESUS DID NOT FALL FOR IT. Instead He showed inner strength. He showed that he was indeed **the Beloved Son of God**.

But what does it mean to be **the Beloved Son** in whom God is well pleased?

How do we deepen our Faith as Children of God? The answer may be in the Spiritual Journey of Jesus.

- We need to listen to the voice of God, calling us His Beloved Children.
- Then we need to follow the lead of the Holy Spirit, even if it seems to bring trials with it.
- We need to spend time in prayer: private prayer-time alone and public prayer with others.
- We need to fight, not fear temptations. The more we resist, the stronger we emerge.
- We need to take on board what it means to be Beloved Children of God.
- Finally, we need to be able to pray in words and show in actions:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,

because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to captives and

recovery of sight to the blind,

to let the oppressed, go free,

to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

Jessica LaGrone in her book called **“Inside the Miracles of Jesus”**, writes:
“You and I are going to have good days and bad days, but remember, too, that we are people of the cross. And because of the cross of Jesus, because of the desperation that overcame death, our worst day actually becomes our best”;⁹ (Page 121)

It will help us to “emerge stronger and finer and purer from the ordeal.

² Bible Commentaries William Barclay's Daily Study Bible Matthew Chapter 4

³ Paraphrase of “First Sunday of Lent “THE RELENTLESS WIDOW” by John Shea page 63

⁴ Paraphrase of “First Sunday of Lent “ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN” by John Shea page 106

⁵ First Sunday of Lent “ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN” by John Shea pages 106-107

⁶ First Sunday of Lent “ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN” by John Shea pages 107

⁷ The Third Sunday of Ordinary time “THE RESTLESS WIDOW” by John Shea, page 28

¹ “OVERCOMER” by Dr. David Jeremiah page 150

⁹ **“Inside the Miracles of Jesus”** by Jessica LaGrone page 121