

**Christ Helps Us Win Over Temptations
Matthew 4:11**

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**May the mercy, grace and peace of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
be with each one of you. Amen.**

Prayer

**May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be pleasing
in Your sight oh Lord, our Rock. Dear God, help us by Your Holy Spirit to
recognize all that Jesus had to suffer to be able to forgive our sins. We ask You,
loving Father, that you will open our mind and heart to Your Word and help us
in those difficult moments of temptation. In the name of Your Son Jesus Christ
we ask it. Amen.**

**This morning's Gospel Reading tells us that the Holy Spirit took Jesus into
the desert to be tempted by the devil. In Matthew 3, the chapter immediately
before today's reading, we are given details of the baptism of Jesus. These great
events in the life of Jesus, His baptism and His temptation, are parallel to the life
of the Israelites.**

**After God took the Israelites out of Egypt, they crossed the Red Sea, and
they were taken into the desert for 40 years. Their crossing of the sea was a type
of baptism and afterward they were led to the desert. Do you see the parallel?**

**In Jesus we can see the true and faithful Israelite who loves God. God hopes
that His people would live and die always trusting in Him, but they never could
do it, except in Jesus. He was the only person who lived and died as God hoped.
In other words, Jesus is the true Israel.**

**When God took His people into the desert after the exodus from Egypt, it
was to test them to see whether they would trust Him and keep His Word or not.
They, of course, failed completely. The Holy Spirit took Jesus into the desert to be
tempted by Satan, to show Himself to be the perfect Son of God, perfectly
obedient in the name of Israel and in the name of the whole world, including us.**

**As the people of Israel failed when they were tested, we, too, fail
continually and repeatedly when we are tested. Our own lives are parallel with
that of Jesus. As we cannot keep God's Law as we should, Jesus had to be
subjected to temptation in our place. The difference is that unlike the old Israel**

and us, Jesus, the true Israel came out of the temptation having beaten the devil at his own game. Jesus conquered every time with the Word of God.

Today is the first Sunday in Lent, a period of 40 days. Beginning another Lent, we face the temptation of Jesus. And I suppose that we, as good Christians, find ourselves asking a series of basic questions about it.

The main questions are, "What does this mean? What does it mean that Jesus was tempted by the devil and came out victorious? What does it mean that Jesus never gave in to the devil's lies and promises? In Hebrews 4:15 it says *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.* Then, what does it mean that Jesus was tempted just as we are, but without sin? I ask God that at the end of this sermon that you, with the help of the Holy Spirit, will be able to answer these questions.

Many people see the temptation of Jesus simply as a lesson about how to deal with temptation. When we ask what the temptation of Jesus means, or what it's about, we could conclude that it gives us a course of action, a battle plan, so to speak, to face our own temptations. The devil comes to us with his whole arsenal and it's up to us to follow Jesus' example, take up the Word of God, and stand firm and not give in. In that sense, the temptation of Jesus is a source of potential help, but only in the measure of how well we are able to manage God's Word faithfully without changing what it says.

Many people see Jesus' whole life like this. That is to say, the Savior offers us a model for a holy life. In other words, people would say, "The Scriptures are an instruction manual, a book that teaches us how to live, and in the end, how to die." Here in the United States years ago there was a movement called WWJD...What would Jesus do?" This movement taught that life offers us an endless series of choices and decisions.

Those who see the Bible as an instruction manual search its pages frantically searching for a passage about their particular problem. Success in faith and in life is measured by the ability to apply correctly the appropriate Bible principle in our life. And everybody knows that we are sinners who are not perfect. We know that in the end, the only one who can help us interpret or understand the Bible or the will of God is God Himself. God the Holy Spirit is always our guide to Christ.

And, yes, there is a sense in which Jesus is a model for us to follow. In His life and His ministry, Jesus was perfect in everything He thought and in everything

He said, and in everything He did. Never was a life more worthy of following than His. But the Law of God establishes a standard that is always out of our reach. As much as we want to follow Jesus' example, it is impossible because of our sinful nature.

Clearly our problem is not a lack of information or holy examples to follow. Our problem is that we lack the will and the ability to do what we ought to do. Without God in us we cannot do anything good.

This brings me to what Saint Paul says in Romans 7:19-25: *For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.* ²⁰ *Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.* ²¹ *So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand.* ²² *For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being,* ²³ *but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.* ²⁴ *Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?* ²⁵ *Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.*

Paul recognized that he can't do it. What's more he recognizes that the only one who could do it for him was Jesus Christ his Lord. This is my point. It's not just following Jesus' example but recognizing that we do it because it is He who sustains us, especially when we have too many temptations in our way.

Jesus was tempted by the devil not only to show us how to resist temptation, but to be our perfect substitute. Our Savior Jesus was the one who met the devil face to face and came out the winner, not for His own good, but for ours. Brothers and sisters, Jesus lived a perfect life not simply to give us a model to follow, but to be what we never could be, that is, a holy and pleasing offering to the Father in heaven. When Jesus was baptized the Father said, *"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."* The last week when we read about the Transfiguration, God the father again said, *"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,"* then added, "LISTEN TO HIM."

The holy Gospel of God tells us that the whole life and ministry of His Son Jesus was done vicariously; it was done for us and for the whole world. His temptation was something He actively did in the sense that He obeyed perfectly the will of the Father opposing the devil's lies and accusations.

By confronting the temptations in His own life, we need to learn or remember, first, that Jesus knows everything we go through. He understands our

temptations. This goes along with what I said before from Hebrews 4:15: *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.* Second, it is good to remember that even though the battle with the devil is too much for us, it was not too much for Jesus. His victory over temptation is our victory over temptation.

And, of course, when we, like the ancient Israelites, do not follow God's will for our lives. That is where we need to remember that Jesus' death was also for us. He did not die for Himself, but rather, He died for us out of love because He was without sin.

When I studied theology it was always hard for me to understand the vicarious sacrifice of Jesus, His sacrifice in our place. One of my professors took me to the writings of Martin Luther, a pastor in the Church. Pastor Luther wrote a commentary about the Letter to the Galatians. There he explained the true meaning of the vicarious nature of Jesus' death. He wrote: *Jesus took the form of a sinner and a murderer, and not of one only, but of all sinners and all murderers. Because all of us are sinners and murderers, and therefore, deserving of death and eternal condemnation. But Christ took on Himself all our sins and died on the cross for them. This is the reason why He had to become a sinner and, as Isaiah says, "He was counted among the sinners." And in truth, all the prophets saw in the Spirit that Christ was going to be the worst sinner, murderer, adulterer, thief, sacrilege and blasphemer of all, such as never had been in the world. Because He took our place, that is to say, carrying all the sins of the world.*

All that Jesus did for all of us, both active and passive, He gave us freely through our baptism. Israel passed through the waters of the Red Sea only to face temptations without number on the other side. We come out of the water of baptism as declared enemies of the devil. But more than that, we come out of our baptism as a dearly loved child of God, an heir of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Something interesting happens in Jesus' baptism. Jesus' life became our life and His death became our death. Jesus took on all our guilt while we are cleansed and forgiven.

In this first week of Lent we think about that. We think about the temptations that await us today and tomorrow. In the midst of the coming temptations if we ask ourselves whether we will come out victorious. I want you to know that in Jesus Christ, baptized in Christ, the answer is a resounding YES WE WILL WIN because He will help us be able to fight, whatever the temptation.

Jesus is not just an example of how we should live our life. It is much deeper than that. Jesus IS our life. In the words of Saint Paul in Galatians 2:20: *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

Dear brothers and sisters, there will always be temptations, but in Christ Jesus we will win the battle because He is our life. And He will always help us and go ahead of us. But if you fall into temptation never forget that in Christ there is grace and mercy. Repent of your sin, recognize that you have failed and confess to God. He loves to forgive you.

The peace of God that surpasses all understanding guard and keep your hearts in Christ Jesus. Amen.