



My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Lent has begun! This year, as with every year, the First Sunday of Lent has us pondering over the temptation of Jesus in the Desert. It is a great opportunity to ponder on how we are tempted, as well as how to overcome temptation.

Jesus is tempted in three ways – with bodily pleasure (turning stones into bread), with things that will amaze the imagination (the wonder of miraculously not being hurt when being thrown from the Temple), and with power (Satan promises all the kingdoms of the world to Jesus).

Many times when we look at temptation, we think that it is from thoughts or images that come into our mind. They tempt us toward things which are illicit, toward sins that take us away from God. However, I have found that the most effective temptation comes not when thoughts are imposed in my mind, but when I forget. What do I mean? It is when *I forget who God is and who I am to God* that I am most sorely tempted. You see, God is my Father. He loves me more than anyone else in creation loves me. He wants my good, my happiness. He *is* the fulfillment of all my desires. I am His beloved son. It is when I forget His love, His care, His goodness, that I seek love and satisfaction from lesser things – things that ultimately leave me empty.

We see that Satan uses this tactic with Jesus. What are the first words he says to Jesus in the first two temptations? “If you are the son of God...” (Matthew 4:3, 6). The devil is trying to get Jesus to doubt His identity as God’s beloved Son. In the third temptation, Satan tries to make Jesus think that he can provide everything that the Father does. He is implicitly saying to Jesus, “I am as powerful as God.” Jesus successfully overcomes all these temptations, not because of His moral perfection and strength, but because He knows who He is and how He is loved by God the Father.

I really think this is the key to everything. From the beginning, the devil has tried to get us to think that God is not for us but against us, that He will not provide everything for us, that He is not a good, good Father. Even in the Garden of Eden, he attempted (and succeeded) in getting Adam and Eve to doubt that God would provide for them. This is how he continues to work in our lives.

But if we strive to remember that God really IS GOOD, that He loves us, and wants us to have the true fulfillment of our desires, then we will disregard the false fulfillment offered by the devil. When we know how loved we are by God, we will not seek partial and false loves to fill our emptiness. When we know that we are beloved sons and daughters of God, we will look to our Father first for everything. Then, we will not need to be moral “heroes,” but, rather, be simple, little children in the arms of our loving God and Father.

I encourage you the next time you are tempted – and you know what your temptations are – to take that temptation and refer it to Jesus. Ask Him to enter into the temptation and show you who you are and who God is. When His loves pours over you, I bet that you will find that the temptation will lose its power, and you will find yourself embraced in the loving arms of God, your beloved Father.