

2021 Invocabit  
Matthew 4:1-11

Today we want to try and wrap our head around the idea that Satan tempts and God tests.

Our Gospel reading clearly says that Jesus is driven out into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit to be tempted by Satan.

Jesus is still wet from His baptism when He is driven out into the wilderness. He fasts for forty days and forty nights. This is the proper sense of the word, fast. He doesn't give up chocolate or meat only for forty days but doesn't eat or drink for forty days. Indeed, this is a supernatural kind of fast.

But we must understand the humiliation of Jesus to understand this time of temptation. Technically, the humiliation of Jesus means that He did not always or fully use His divine powers. This explains how Jesus could learn as a child. It explains how Jesus didn't know the time when He will come again in glory. This explains how Jesus could die on the cross. And, of course, this explains how Jesus could be tempted.

Our High Priest was truly tempted. As Hebrews 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.”* (Hebrews 4:15)

Jesus was tempted by Satan just as Adam and Eve were tempted in the garden. It was a real temptation.

You can tempt me with cauliflower all day long and it's no true temptation. It's easy for me to resist it. But if you tempt me with ice cream, it's a different story. I try not to keep ice cream in the house because I can't resist it! That's a real temptation for me. Of course, this is silly in a way, because we're talking about food. But hunger can be a true temptation. Especially if you haven't eaten in forty days and are hungry!

Jesus suffered real temptation.

First, He was tempted to not trust that His Father would care for Him and He needed to care for Himself. We pray the following before meals, if we follow the habit of the Small Catechism:

*“The eyes of all look to You, [O Lord,] and You give them their food at the proper time. You open Your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing.” (Ps 145:15-16)*

Which comes from Psalm 145. It’s in the Daily Prayers section of the catechism, if you’re interested in looking it up later.

It is one of the many promises of God to take care of His creation. It applies to Jesus. It also applies to you.

But Satan wants you to believe that God doesn’t care for you and that He won’t take care of you. He sends famines, ice storms and the like to make food scarce. He doesn’t just use food but tries to entice all your passions.

Is chastity really the best for you? Not only does God say chastity is best, it’s actually for your wellbeing. Chastity is a God given virtue inside and outside of marriage.

James reminds us that Satan uses our own desires against us:

*“But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.” (James 1:14)*

He tempted Jesus with food because Jesus was extremely hungry. Hunger is not a bad desire, but Satan uses it to tempt Jesus. And you.

Satan tempts. God tests.

God uses Satan’s temptation to see if Jesus would trust His dear Father in heaven.

God uses Satan’s temptations against you to test you to see if you will place your trust in Him.

Next, Satan tempts Jesus to tempt God.

There are a lot of laws in the Bible. There are a lot of promises in the Bible, thanks be to God. We aren't supposed to flaunt either the law or the promises.

Satan is asking Jesus to tempt God by acting carelessly and relying on God to fix it.

To act careless in such a manner is to break the fifth commandment. God has given us the gift of life. He also gives us a hedge of protection in the ten commandments. To act carelessly is to abuse the gift of life that God has given you and ignore His life-protecting law.

You see this behavior in teenagers a lot. But you also see it in us adults.

Anytime you break the commandments assuming God will forgive you, you're putting God to the test.

Paul addresses this in Romans:

*“What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?” (Romans 6:15–16)*

Not only do you sin against God, but you risk becoming enslaved to stuff like sex, or food, or alcohol, or possessions. Not only is this a horrible way to live, it can eventually lead to eternal damnation!

Anytime you act recklessly without a thought for harming yourself or others, you're putting God to the test.

It's hard to come up with an example of this in the Bible. This thing called free time is very new in history. The ancients didn't have time for distraction except for maybe the 1% who were rich. Everyone else was too busy trying to put food on the table and protect their loved ones.

Maybe a good example comes from Daniel. The wise man in Babylon, the Chaldeans tried to get Daniel and his three friends killed because they were jealous of them.

They showed they cared nothing for the lives of others and acted recklessly. God is not mocked. He protected Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace and the Chaldeans were killed in it instead!

Satan tempts. God tests.

God uses Satan's temptation to see if Jesus would not tempt God His Father.

God uses Satan's temptations against you to test you to see if you will put the Lord, Your God to the test or not.

Finally, Satan tempts Jesus to forego suffering on our behalf. Jesus knew exactly what He must do to save us from our sins. Satan, who knows the Scriptures better than you or me, knows that if Jesus is successful, he is defeated!

In Matthew 28, we hear Jesus say:

*“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”*

God the Father gives all authority to Jesus because He did His Father's will. Rescue poor miserable sinners by His obedient life and death on a cross. He also gains the victory over sin, death and Satan. Satan does all he can to prevent Jesus from succeeding. When Jesus does not give into temptation, the Luke account says that Satan “departed from [Jesus] until an opportune time. Most likely, that time is what we have pictured here in our sanctuary. Jesus in Gethsemane.

Satan tempts you in the same way. In life you will have suffering and pain. We live in a sin filled world which we add too with our own sin. Because of this, we suffer and die. It seems in America like we do everything we can to avoid suffering and pain. Some Christians try to convince you that once you're a Christian, all suffering and pain is gone. I love a line from the Princess' Bride: “Life is pain, highness. Anyone who says differently is selling something.” Buyer beware!

Satan tempts. God tests.

God uses Satan's temptation to see if Jesus will indeed do His will.

God uses Satan's temptations against you to test you to see if you will cling to Him through suffering and pain.

These three temptations are insidious in another way!

They are temptations for you to doubt your identity in Christ.

Jesus had just been baptized. He hears these marvelous words:

*“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” (Mt 3:17)*

Even though you can't hear it, our loving Father in heaven says the same thing about you. “This is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased.” or “This is my beloved daughter with whom I am well pleased.”

But Satan wants you to doubt God's words.

He tempts Jesus, “if you are the Son of God...” He tempts you in the same way. “if you are God's beloved child...”

First, He tempts you to sin like he does with Jesus. There's nothing better that Satan likes than to see one of God's children sin. Make no mistake, Satan, the world, and wretched people love to pervert innocent children. When I say innocent here, I mean it in a horizontal way. All are born in sin, but there's a difference between a child who hasn't consumed pornography and one who has. The one who hasn't consumed pornography is innocent before men. And evil would have all our children consumed with pornography. And all our adults as well. Evil would have those who have partaken of the sin of pornography to be ensnared by it and never escape!

Second and worse, Satan wants you afraid to go to God for forgiveness. He tries to convince you that God's love is conditional on your behavior and not your identity. Satan wants you afraid to approach God. But you know the parable of the lost sheep. The lost sheep has wandered away from the sheepfold. One of the definitions for sin is “to wander.” Jesus, our Good Shepherd, doesn't wait for the lost sheep to wander back to the sheepfold, but He goes out and seeks the lost sheep Himself! Jesus doesn't act from anger, but He acts out of love and mercy!

There isn't any sin that you've done that isn't covered by God's love and mercy. His love that He showed us on the cross and the mercy that he bestows in Baptism, Absolution, and His Supper. Your baptism is always available to you. When you sin and repent, you don't have to get baptized again. As we confess in the creed, there's only one Baptism and it's efficacious for you always!

Absolution and the Lord's Supper come to you repeatedly to forgive your sins and remind you that you're covered with the blood of Jesus!

This Lent, we are looking at the Lord's Prayer. The sixth petition covers what you've heard about today:

Lead us not into temptation.

*What does this mean?* God tempts no one. We pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our sinful nature may not deceive us or mislead us 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.

Satan tempts. God tests.

Satan would have you mislead into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice. He will continue to attack you until you pass from death into eternal life. He wants to steal you from the kingdom of life into the kingdom of death.

Do not despair. God makes you a promise through the Apostle Paul:

*"No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation He will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it." (1 Cor 10:13)*

The way of escape is God's Word. The preached word. The Word of Absolution. The visible Word of bread and wine. The meditated upon Word.

But I hope you noticed that Satan used God's Word as well. Like I said before, he knows it better than you and me. He will twist it any way he can to fool you.

That's why we care about how we ingest God's Word. We don't listen to false or heterodox teachers. That's dangerous and can lead us into false belief. Even with heterodox teachers. Imagine you have a glass of water before you. It's the purest most fresh tasting water you've ever seen. If I put a drop, just a drop, or arsenic in it, would you drink it? I certainly hope not! That's dangerous for your physical health. Drinking from the fount of false or heterodox teachers is dangerous to your spiritual health.

The pure, fresh tasting confession of Scriptures is found in our confessions. In them, you learn:

The Bible's all about Jesus. For example, David and Goliath isn't a story about how you can slay your made-up Goliaths, but is a picture of Jesus slaying sin, death, and the devil.

The Bible is full of both Law and Gospel. The Law shows you your sin and the Gospel shows you your Savior.

Your salvation is won by Christ and not your merits. Salvation really is the free gift of God for unworthy sinners.

The Sacraments are all about God working on us in pure grace and mercy. We don't come to church to serve God, but to be served by Him!

God's presence is found in Word and Sacrament and not in your heart or emotions or experiences. Therefore, we seek God in His Word and Sacraments.

Jesus is truly, bodily present in His Supper. He gives you the gift of life by giving you Himself!

Cling to the Word and Sacraments.

In them is protection against all manner of temptation and suffering.

Jesus won the victory over temptation. He gives you that victory in your Baptism. Even more, He gives you His Holy Spirit so that you're enabled to resist temptation and suffering with His aid. And when you fall, He is there with His forgiveness so that you might arise again and finally win the victory over sin, death, and the devil yourself.

May God be praised for His wonderful gifts of Word and Sacrament!

In Jesus' name. Amen.