

Tested - by the Devil

Deuteronomy 26¹⁻¹¹; Psalm 91¹⁻¹¹; Romans 10⁸⁻¹³; Luke 4¹⁻¹³

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. [Luke 4¹⁻²]

If you ever feel that you are being tested by the Devil - Congratulations! You are in good company. We know from the Gospel today that Jesus was tempted by the Devil. The Devil has no need to waste his time on those who are no danger to him, those who are easily distracted from their Christian duties of reading the Bible, of Prayer and of living a life of love. When the Devil is at your heels, you know that you are dangerous!

It is important to learn from Jesus and how he dealt with being tested by the Devil:

- ✠ Jesus was on a spiritual high - he had been baptised by John and know that the ministry he had been waiting 30 years for was beginning. He was where God wanted him to be - we know that because it says quite clearly, **[he] was led by the Spirit**. Being secure in God's purpose makes you a target - but it also gives strength to stand firm.
- ✠ The temptation had already been happening during the **40 day** fast before we join the story. Matthew's Gospel makes it clearer that the period set aside for prayer was over and Luke simply states that **he was famished**.
- ✠ From this we learn two of the key ways in which the Devil operates. Firstly, he tries to make us question ourselves: **If you are the Son of God?** If anyone knew who Jesus was, it was the Devil; yet he tries to get Jesus to question who he is. For us that can often take the form, *What, YOU, a Christian? What sort of Christian are YOU?* We should never doubt that God only ever sees us through Jesus as the lens - we are always accepted, forgiven and loved and we should never forget it. Secondly, the temptation to **command the stone to become a loaf** must have had some appeal. But, this would be to give in to finding an easy way out - and that is never God's way.
- ✠ The second temptation was about **worship**; the things that we value. This can be so subtle and we can be so easily drawn away from that absolute demand: **worship the Lord your God and serve him only**. The greatest danger here is that of the creeping temptation that takes time and

devotion to God - justified by an emergency, or just this once - and the Devil wins when it becomes a habit and God is relegated from the one who above all others and everything else receives our worship.

- ✠ Jesus responds to the Devil by quoting Scripture - **it is written**. When the third temptation is to test God, the Devil says to Jesus, **it is written** and puts a spin on the Psalm we read together. This has been one of the easiest ways the Devil uses to test us: he makes us doubt what God says. In the Garden of Eden the serpent opens up the conversation with Eve by saying, **Did God say...?** [Gen 3:1] Or in Job, the Devil says to God, **Does Job fear God for nothing?** [Job 1:9] The temptation is to try to argue, but arguing with the Devil is like trying to reason with a drunk - pointless and frustrating and a waste of time! Jesus responds by cutting him off, **It is said, do not put the Lord your God to the test**.

It won't be many weeks before we read, on the brink of the Passion, **Simon, Simon, listen! Satan has demanded to sift you like wheat** and then goes on to say **but I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail** [Lk 22:31]. And that is what we need to survive the Devil's testing. We know that while we are alive - and especially if we are the people God wants us to be in the place where God has placed us - we can hope for no better than Jesus - **[the Devil] departed from him until an opportune time!**

When you leave today I am offering you a cross and piece of sandpaper. The crosses are rough, reminding us of the ragged edges of our own faith. And as we respond to the Devil's testing, we triumph only through the cross. Use the sandpaper as a meditation to focus on the cross and as the cross becomes more beautiful, sanded, perhaps with some decoration or some oil by Easter, it will be a tangible reminder that our faith is being shaped by God! Then we shall be finished by God, not finished-off by the Devil!