

THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS

I want to tell you a story. When I was 6 or seven, there was a bully in our street. Every time I went to school, he would bully me and take whatever money or candy that I had. I was stressed out for a long time but finally I told my dad about this. Next day my dad came with me and he went straight to the bully and, of course the bully ran away frightened and crying. Of course the bully was humiliated and he never bothered me anymore. I also lost my fear of the bully, because my dad has demonstrated to me that he is not really strong and that if one resists him he will show his real colours. In a way I gained victory over the bully through my father. It was really my father who was victorious against the bully but I also shared in the victory.

The same thing happened when Jesus allowed the Devil to tempt him. You see, our great grandparents Adam and Eve, lost badly when they were tempted by the evil. We inherited this defeat from them, when we inherited the human nature from them. Defeat was built into our nature, and all the generations that came after Adam and Eve were terrorized by the Devil. No one could stand against him because of this weak and defeated nature. It is for this reason that Christ decided to take on the bully on our behalf, so that, when he becomes victorious against him, we too can become victorious. But, in order to give us as humans victory over the Devil, he had to take our own nature, so that when he defeats the Devil, the human nature that he took on wins the victory over the Devil.

But Jesus took on the Devil only after being baptized and after receiving the Holy Spirit, so that he teaches us that when we are baptized, we are born again, and instead of the fallen defeated nature that we inherited from Adam and Eve, we put on the victorious human nature that has been renewed by Christ.

But, was Jesus in need of baptism, or of receiving the Holy Spirit or of fasting? The reading of today says that Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit. Was Jesus in need of being filled by the Holy Spirit? The answer is no! Because He is the giver of the Holy Spirit. He did that so that our human nature which he took from us may be filled by the Holy Spirit. When the Lord accepted our human nature in order to save us he was not ashamed of our poverty and our weakness. And having shared our poverty and our weakness he became sanctified for our sake, even though he is the sanctifier of all the creation. By resembling us in every thing except sin, he became sanctified like man even though he sanctifies like God.

We are also told that He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. What does that mean? It does not mean that he was taken by the Spirit into the wilderness. It means that he lead a spiritual life. Being led by the Spirit means following the Spirit and leading a life that is Spiritual and not carnal. The proof of this is in the next verse which tells us that in those days he ate nothing which means he fasted. Fasting for forty days means that he led a spiritual life or was lead by the Spirit. St. Paul explains this to us when he says in Rom 8:14, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." To be led by the Spirit of God means to allow the Spirit of God to lead you into a life of holiness and spiritual strife

But, why did he fast? We fast so that we can subdue our carnal desires, but what need had Christ for fasting? Him Who is holy and undefiled by nature? Him Who is without blemish, Who knew not sin, why did he spend forty days in the wilderness and why did he fast, and why did he allow the Devil to tempt him?

He did that to give us an example. He did that to teach us, that through fasting we can humiliate Satan and trample him under our feet like Jesus did. To teach us that when we are baptized and become filled with the Holy Spirit, and are led by the Spirit or live according to the Spirit and not according to the flesh, and when we endure in fasting, Satan becomes powerless against us.

We are then told that when the forty days ended he hungered. But how can the bread of life hunger? Him who opens his hand and satisfies every living thing Him that gives all their food in due season, can he hunger?(Ps 145:15-6) He hungered in order to resemble us in everything except for sin. He hungered to confuse Satan and hide his divinity from him. You see Satan was confused, is this the Son of God or just another one of those prophets that I have taken captives in Hades? When he fasted for forty days Satan said maybe He is the Son of God, the one that will come to bind me and give release to those who are bound in Hades (Liturgy of St. Gregory) But when he hungered Satan said the Son of God can not hunger.

That is why Satan dared Christ to change the stone into bread. "If thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread." (Luke 4:3) He wanted to know whether he is really the Son of God. He said, "if he does it then he is the Son of God, but if he refuses to do it then he is not. But Jesus knowing his tricks, neither does the miracle nor admit that he is unable to do it, but rather brushes him aside by saying, "That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God." (Luke 4:4) Moses and Elijah both fasted for forty days and forty nights being sustained by the words that God spoke unto them.

Jesus fasted in order to avenge Adam's defeat when he was tempted. And in order to erase that defeat that we inherited from Adam. By eating, Adam was conquered and we were conquered with him for we were in Adam when he fell, but when Jesus fasted he conquered and we conquered with him and through Him. The Liturgy of St. Gregory explains this beautifully when it tells us, "Thou, the Infinite, being God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but humbled Thyself, and took the form of a servant; and blessed my nature in Thee; and fulfilled Thy Law, on my behalf." Christ took our nature, the nature of servants in order to bless our nature in Him. He fulfilled His law which we could not fulfill on our behalf.

Whenever we fast, like the Lord fasted, we re-live this victory over Satan that we gained through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The Devil is reminded of his humiliating defeat before Christ and we are reminded of our victory over him through Christ. And the same Jesus that conquered the Devil, we partake of whenever we take communion. And as we receive His body and His blood we receive the same power that conquered Satan.

So, let us fast in purity and righteousness and let us uphold the victory that Christ won for us when he fasted for us.