



The Holy See

JUBILEE OF THE WORLD OF VOLUNTEERING

HOLY MASS

HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER FRANCIS READ BY CARDINAL MICHAEL CZERNY

*Saint Peter's Square
1st Sunday in the Season of Lent, 9 March 2025*

[Multimedia]

Jesus is led by the Spirit into the desert (cf. *Lk 4:1*). Every year, our Lenten journey begins by following the Lord there and sharing in that experience, which he transformed for our benefit. When Jesus entered the desert, a decisive change occurred: the place of silence became a place of listening. In the desert, our ability to listen is put to the test, because a choice must be made between two completely different voices. In this regard, the Gospel tells us that Jesus' journey began with an act of listening and obedience: it is the Holy Spirit, the very power of God, who leads him to a place where nothing good springs from the ground or rains down from the sky. In the desert, we experience material and spiritual poverty, our need for bread and for God's word.

Jesus, who is true man, experienced that hunger (cf. v. 2). He was tempted for forty days by a word that came not from the Holy Spirit, but from the evil one, the devil. Having begun the forty days of Lent, let us reflect on the fact that we too are tempted, yet are not alone. Jesus is with us, to guide us through the desert. The Son of God made man does not simply give us an example of how to combat evil. He gives us something much greater: the strength to resist its attacks and to persevere on our journey.

So let us consider three aspects of Jesus' temptation and of our own: its *beginning*, the *way* it takes place and its *result*. In this way, we will find inspiration for our journey of conversion.

First of all, the *beginning*. Jesus' temptation is intentional: the Lord does not go into the desert to show the strength of his will, but out of filial openness to the Spirit of the Father, whose guidance he readily and freely accepts. Our temptation, on the other hand, is not intentional: evil is prior to our freedom, attacking it from within, like an inner shadow and a constant threat. Whenever we ask God not to lead us into temptation (cf. *Mt* 6:13), we need to remember that he has already answered that prayer through Jesus, his incarnate Word, who remains with us always. The Lord is close to us and cares for us, especially in times of trial and uncertainty, when the tempter makes his voice heard. He is the father of lies (cf. *Jn* 8:44), perverse and perversive, for he knows God's word without understanding it. Quite the opposite: just as he had done since the days of Adam in the Garden of Eden (cf. *Gen* 3:1-5), so he does now in the case of Jesus, the new Adam, in the desert.

Here we see the remarkable *way* in which Christ is tempted, namely, through his relationship with God, his Father. The devil is the one who separates and divides, whereas Jesus is the one who unites God and man, the mediator. In his perversion, the devil wants to destroy that bond and have Jesus exploit his position. He says: "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread" (*Lk* 4:3), and again: "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down" (v. 9) from the pinnacle of the Temple. In response to these temptations, Jesus, the Son of God, led by the Spirit, chooses the *way* that he will live out his filial relationship to the Father. This is what the Lord chooses: his unique and exclusive relationship with God, whose only Son he is, becomes a relationship that embraces everyone, without excluding anyone. Jesus' relationship with the Father is not something to be grasped at (cf. *Phil* 2:6), or boasted of, in order to achieve success and attract followers, but rather a gift that he shares with the world for our salvation.

We too are tempted in our relationship with God, but in a completely different way. The devil whispers into our ear that God is not really our Father, that he has in fact abandoned us. Satan tries to convince us that there is no bread for the hungry, least of all from stones, that angels will not come to our aid when we are falling, and that at best, the world is in the hands of evil powers that crush nations by their arrogant schemes and the brutality of war. Yet just when the devil would have us believe that the Lord is far from us, and would tempt us to despair, God draws all the closer to us, giving his life for the redemption of the world.

The third aspect is the *result* of these temptations. Jesus, God's Anointed One, vanquishes evil; he drives away the devil, who will nonetheless return to tempt him, waiting for "another opportunity" (v. 13). So the Gospel tells us, and we will keep this in mind when, on Golgotha, Jesus is tempted again: "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross" (*Mt* 27:40; cf. *Lk* 23:35). In the desert, the Tempter is defeated, yet Christ's victory is not yet definitive, as it will be in the paschal mystery of his death and resurrection.

As we prepare to celebrate this, the central mystery of our faith, we realize that the result of our own trials is different. In the face of temptation, we sometimes fall; we are all sinners. Our defeat,

however, is not definitive, because following our every fall, God lifts us up by his infinite love and forgiveness. Our testing does not end in failure, because, in Christ, we are redeemed from evil. As we journey through the desert with him, we follow a road previously untravelled: Jesus himself opens up before us this new path of liberation and redemption. By following the Lord in faith, from drifters we become pilgrims.

Dear sisters and brothers, I invite you to begin your Lenten journey in this way. And since, along the way, we need the “good will” (*buona volontà*) that the Holy Spirit always sustains in us, I am pleased to greet all the “volunteers” (*volontari*) who are here in Rome today for their Jubilee pilgrimage. I thank you heartily, dear friends, because, following the example of Jesus, you serve your neighbours unstintingly. On the streets and in homes, in the company of the sick, the suffering and the imprisoned, with the young and the elderly, your generosity and commitment offer hope to our entire society. In the deserts of poverty and loneliness, all those small gestures are helping to make a new humanity blossom in the garden that is God’s dream, always and everywhere, for all of us.