98. The Great Combat

By Fr. Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, O.C.D.

1. On this day, which is the real beginning of Lent, the Church invites us to the great combat, the struggle against sin which will bring us to the Easter resurrection. Our model is Jesus, Who although exempt from the incitements of concupiscence, willed to be tempted by the devil *for us*, in order to have "compassion on our infirmities" (Heb. 4:15).

After forty days of rigorous fast, while He is feeling the pangs of hunger, Jesus is tempted by Satan to change stones into bread. No one can undertake a serious program of penance or mortification without feeling its discomforts; but that is the time to resist the insinuating voices which invite us to condescend to the demands of nature; that is the time to reply with Jesus, "not in bread alone doth man live, but in every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God" (Gosp.: Matt. 4:1-11). Man's life is far more dependent on the will of God than on material food. If we are convinced of this truth, we shall have the courage to submit to privations, trusting in divine Providence for our sustenance.

Jesus was next tempted to pride. "If Thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down … and in their hands the angels shall bear Thee up." Such a miracle would have aroused the admiration and enthusiasm of the people, but Jesus knew that His Father had chosen an entirely different way for Him — the way of humiliations rather than of triumphs, the way of the Cross and of death. Because He had no desire to escape from this way, He resolutely rejected the suggestion of pride. The best means of conquering temptations to pride and vanity is to choose exactly what humiliates us and makes us appear little in the eyes of others.

The devil returns to the attack and tempts Jesus to avarice: "All these I will give Thee, if falling down Thou wilt adore me." But Jesus replies, "The Lord thy God shalt thou adore and Him only shalt thou serve!" He whose heart is firmly anchored in God will never be drawn away from His service by an attraction for, or envy of, earthly things. But if this strong adherence to God is weakened or lost, the temptations to avarice will often succeed in making even those stray who have a special vocation to be "serving God alone."

2. Jesus is tempted because He willed it. We, however, are tempted without willing it, and often against our will. The temptation of Jesus was wholly exterior, for it found no echo within Him; on the contrary, our nature, wounded by the triple concupiscence of the flesh, of pride, and of avarice, is not only an easy prey for the assaults of the devil, but is itself the

Copyright © catholicfamilynews.com. All rights reserved.

source of many temptations; our virtue does not consist in being exempt from them but in being able to overcome them. It is a struggle which none can escape; God even wishes this struggle to be the price of eternal life. “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he hath been proved, he shall receive the crown of life” (Jam. 1:12).

Let us learn from Jesus how to conduct ourselves in temptations. Primarily, He teaches us to have a great confidence in God. Jesus would not satisfy His hunger, nor impress men by means of a brilliant miracle, nor accept kingdoms and wealth because, in a spirit of perfect filial obedience, He had entrusted everything to the Father’s care — His life, His mission, and His glory. Those who will fully trust in God and who rely on His divine Providence, will not be easily enticed by the vain flattery of the devil, the world, or the flesh, because they know that only God can give true blessings and real happiness.

We should extend the practice of this confidence to the moment of temptation. If God permits us to be tempted, He does not permit us to be tempted beyond our strength, and, accompanying every temptation, there is always a special actual grace sufficient to overcome it. Therefore, instead of being disturbed by the violence of the struggle, let us use faithfully the grace God always gives and turn to Him in humble, confident prayer.

Text taken from Divine Intimacy *(Baronius Press, 2015), pp. 278-280.*

Copyright © catholicfamilynews.com. All rights reserved.