

## The First Sunday of Lent 18 February 2018

*“Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation!”* II Cor. 6:2

Today, the Church initiates the penitential season of Lent in order to prepare us for the glorious resurrection at Easter. In today’s Epistle (II Cor. 6:1-10) St. Paul reminds us of the spiritual warfare we all face in working out our salvation. *“Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation!”* The Gospel (Mt. 4:1-11), warns us in the three temptations of Jesus to arm ourselves with God’s Word in order to conquer Satan who continually tempts us to do evil works that serve his kingdom. In *The Liturgical Year Vol. 5* by Dom Prosper Gueranger, O.S.B., we find the traditional teaching of the Church on how these temptations relate to Lent and the spiritual life.

### The Spiritual Battle against the Devil

Dom Gueranger dismisses those commentators of his day (19<sup>th</sup> Century) and, even more so, in our day, that St. Paul is not to be taken literally because he was writing only for the early days of the Church when the Christians were continually facing death. This false interpretation **“is full of that discretion which meets with the applause of our cowardice, and it easily persuades us to be at rest, just as though we had no dangers to fear, and no battle to fight; whereas, we have both: for there is the devil, the world, flesh and blood. ....That such a misfortune may not befall us, the Church cries out to us, in the words of St. Paul: *“Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation!”*”** II Cor. 6:2 (p. 131) We have the example of St. Paul who tells us of all the sufferings and the indifference and hatred of some of the Corinthians to his apostolic work: *“We give no offense to anyone, that our ministry may not be blamed...in much patience; in tribulations, in hardships, in distress; ...in honour and dishonour, in evil report and good report...as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet enriching many, as having nothing yet possessing all things.”* II Cor. 6: 3-10 Only by overcoming the world, the flesh and the devil will we attain eternal life.

### “The World, the Flesh and the Devil”

In his commentary on today’s gospel, Dom Gueranger tells how we need to overcome our enemies: **“We have three enemies to fight**

against; our soul has three dangers; for, as the beloved disciple says, all that is in the world, is the concupiscence of the flesh, and the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life (cf. Jn. 2:16). By the concupiscence of the flesh is meant the love of sensual things, which covets whatever is agreeable to the flesh, and, when not curbed, draws the soul into unlawful pleasures. Concupiscence of the eyes expresses the love of the goods of this world, such as riches, and possessions; these dazzle the eye, and then seduce the heart. Pride of life is that confidence in ourselves, which leads us to be vain and presumptuous, and makes us forget that all we have, our life and every good gift, we have from God.

**“Every one of our sins comes from one of these three sources; every one of the temptations aims at making us accept the concupiscence of the flesh, or the concupiscence of the eyes (the world), or the pride of life (the devil). Our Saviour, then who would be our model in all things, deigned to subject Himself to these three temptations.”** Gueranger, p. 125

### The Three Temptations of Satan

Dom Gueranger shows us how the three temptations of Jesus by Satan correspond to **“the concupiscence of the flesh, and the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life (cf. Jn. 2:16) p. 125:** First of all Satan tempts Him in what regards the flesh: he suggests to him to satisfy the cravings of hunger, by working a miracle, and changing the stones into bread. If Jesus consents, and shows an eagerness in giving this indulgence to His body, the tempter will conclude that He is but a frail mortal, subject to concupiscence like other men. When he tempts us, who have inherited evil concupiscence from Adam, his suggestions go further than this: he endeavours to defile the soul by the body. But the sovereign holiness of the Incarnate Word could never permit Satan to use upon Him the power which he has received of tempting man in his outward senses. The lesson, therefore, which the Son of God here gives us, is one of temperance: but we know that, for us, temperance is the mother of purity, and that intemperance excites our senses to rebel.

**“The second temptation is to pride: ‘Cast thyself down; the angels shall bear thee up in their hands.’ Ps. 90:11** The enemy is anxious to see if the favours of heaven have produced in Jesus’ soul that haughtiness, that ungrateful self-

confidence, which makes the creature arrogate God's gifts to itself, and forget its benefactor. Here, also, he is foiled; our Redeemer's humility confounds the pride of the rebel angel.

"He then makes a last effort: he hopes to gain over by ambition Him who has given such proofs of temperance and humility. He shows Him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; and says to Him: *'All these will I give thee, if falling down, Thou wilt adore me.'* Mt. 4:9 Jesus rejects the wretched offer, and drives from Him the seducer, the prince of this world (cf. Jn. 14:30); hereby teaching us that we must despise the riches of this world, as often as keeping or getting them is to be on the condition of our violating the law of God and paying homage to Satan." Gueranger, p. 125-6

### Overcome Satan with the Word of God

"But let us observe how it is that our divine Model, our Redeemer, overcomes the tempter. Does he hearken to His words? Does He allow the temptation time, and give it strength by delay? We did so, when we were tempted; and we fell. But our Lord immediately meets each temptation with the shield of God's word. He says: *'It is written: Not on bread alone doth man live.'* Deut. 8:3 *'It is written: Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.'* Deut. 6:16 *'It is written: The Lord thy God shalt thou adore, and Him only shalt thou serve.'* Deut. 6:13. This then, must be our practice for the time to come. Eve brought perdition on herself and on the whole human race because she listened to the serpent. He that dallies with temptation is sure to fall." Gueranger, p. 126-7

### Holy Season of Lent

Dom Gueranger again reminds us how the Church prepares us for the glory of Easter Sunday if we are faithful to the example of Jesus Christ: "We are now in the season (Lent) of extraordinary grace; our hearts are on the watch, dangerous occasions are removed, everything that savours of worldliness is laid aside; our souls, purified by prayer, fasting, and alms deeds, are to rise with Christ, to a new life; but, shall we persevere? All depends upon how we behave under temptation. Here, at the very opening of Lent, the Church gives us this passage of the holy Gospel, that we may have not only precept but example. If we be attentive and faithful, the lesson she gives us will produce its fruit; and when we come to the Easter Solemnity, we shall have those sure

pledges of perseverance: vigilance, self-diffidence, prayer, and the never-failing help of divine grace." Gueranger, p. 126 Let us do all that we can during this holy penitential season of Lent. Jesus told us that *"...unless you repent, you will all perish in the same manner."* Lk. 13:3 Let us deny ourselves in all things as the Angel told the three little children at Fatima: "Make everything a sacrifice!" In this time of great evil in the world Our Lady at Fatima asked us to "Pray the rosary," and "Pray and sacrifice for many souls go to Hell because no one prays and sacrifices for them." Let us do all that we can this Lent to save our own soul and the souls of our families, our friends and the world.