

Jesus calls us to what God wants, not to what we want

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The Gospel reading for the First Sunday of Lent, presents a brief account of the temptation of Jesus which is rich in content. The Spirit drove Jesus out into the desert and He remained in the desert for 40 days. Images should come to our minds of the number 40. It rained 40 days and nights when Noah entered the ark; the people of Israel wandered for 40 years in the desert, struggling between faithfulness to God and the temptation to follow false gods; Moses spent 40 days in prayer on Mount Sinai before receiving the Ten Commandments; and Elijah wandered through the desert for 40 days, being fed by an angel and the Word of God. All of these images are symbolic. All of them demonstrate purification, a spiritual battle, a choice for God or against God.

We are also driven by the Spirit to rely upon our Father, and tempted by Satan to turn away from Him. As we experience this spiritual battle we must always remember that temptations are always from the evil one. They are never from God. God will never, ever tempt us. He allows Satan to tempt us in order to purify us, so that we will be able to discern what is true, and good, and of God, and what is not.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us that as faithful human beings, we are engaged in a battle between good and evil (CCC 409). This is a battle between God and the evil one, Satan. Jesus Himself experienced this battle in His humanity, in the depths of His being. He experienced every temptation every human being has ever had. The author of Hebrews reminds us of that great truth. In writing, he states, "Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses..." Listen to these important words, "...**But one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning.** Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb 4:14-16).

My dearest sisters and brothers, Jesus Himself, in those 40 days in the desert, faced the wild beasts and was ministered to by the angels. He faced wild beasts, the temptations that all of us have ever had. He experienced the temptation of drugs and the use of meth. He experienced the temptations of alcohol. He experienced the temptations of premarital sex and the temptations of homosexual actions. He experienced the temptations of murder and the temptations of theft. He experienced the temptations of materialism. He was tempted as we are. But He always chose the Father. He always resisted. In that, He gives us hope that we can be like Him. In Him, we can overcome the wild beasts.

Who are the ministering angels? First and foremost, Jesus Christ Himself -- Jesus, who calls us away from sin, Jesus who calls us to new life, Jesus who is true God and true man. Our guardian angels, who are promised to us by our God, are with us to defend us and speak to us. The voice of conscience, when we are debating about whether to give in to temptation regarding something that only seems to be a good, warns us, "Do not go there." It is the voice of God crying out to us from the depths of our hearts. The ministering angels are those holy people we look to within our time. Mother Teresa of Calcutta and John Paul II are some in recent memory. People like Dorothy Day, Maximilian Kolbe, Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, Gianna Molla, Padre Pio, and so many others who embraced the way of God are "ministering angels" for us.

After His temptations, Jesus immediately goes and preaches the Gospel. "This is the time of fulfillment" (Mk 1:15). My sisters and brothers, the time of fulfillment is now. This day in 2006, this March fifth, this is the time of fulfillment. Christ is living. He is risen. He is in our midst. He is with us. Our God is not one who abandons us. Our God is truly with us. We are in the desert of this world in the society in which we live. We see the tragedies of our world - the consequences of alcoholism, war, and promiscuous behavior, yet all of that has been conquered in Jesus Christ. "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand" (Mk 1:15). The presence of God is in our midst. He is here. Jesus gives the command: "Repent, and believe in the Gospel" to each of us at this moment.

My dear sisters and brothers, those are hard words for us to hear, because to "repent" means to change our lives. It means giving up all the attachments that we have to anything other than God. It means saying "no" to my will, and saying "yes" to the will of the Father. It is living the words of Mary in our heart: "Let it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38). It is living the words of Jesus at Gethsemane: "Not my will, but your will be done." (Lk 22:42). That is the battle for each and every one of us.

The great problem of today is that there is much confusion between what is good and what is evil. There are those who want to make evil good, and good evil. There is confusion around the person of Jesus Christ, and the demands that He makes upon us. His call is total. We must, before God, make ourselves a total gift to the Father. In order to be faithful to the Commandments, our behavior must change. Look at what Jesus said to His disciples, and what He says to us today. "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake, he will save it." (Lk 9:23-24).

We are to follow Jesus no matter what the cost. In 2003, before he was our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI wrote, "The Jesus of the Gospels is quite different, demanding, bold. The Jesus who makes everything okay for everyone is a phantom, a dream, not a real figure. The Jesus of the Gospels is certainly not convenient for us. But it is precisely in this way that He answers the deepest question of our existence, which—whether we want to or not—keeps us on the lookout for God, for a gratification that is limitless, for the infinite. We must again set out on the way to this real Jesus."

It is the real Jesus that we must set after. Not a Jesus who will say, "You may do whatever you want to do." Not a Jesus who will say, "It is fine for you to use meth." Not a Jesus who will say, "It is fine for you to use contraception or to be sterilized." Not a Jesus who will say, "It is okay for you to have an abortion." Not a Jesus who will say, "You may sleep with whomever you want or engage in homosexual acts or unions." That is not the way of the Gospel. It is not the way of Jesus. He calls us to conversion. He calls us to repentance. He calls us to the ways of God, and we as a people must live that call. He does not call us to what we want, but to what God wants. Our God is an all-consuming God. He is a God of love. He teaches us the true meaning of love, the total gift of self, to love as He has loved us.

During this Lenten season, my prayer for each one of us is that we may know the real Jesus. My prayer is that we may be driven by the Spirit toward the desire for God and for the truth, that we will be willing to enter into the desert in our own lives.

My dearest daughters and sons, we must open our eyes to see how we are influenced by the culture and society in which we live. Look to the Jesus of the Gospel. Be driven by the Spirit. Recognize that the temptations that you face in life are placed there not by God, but by the evil one. They are placed as deceptions and lies to lead you away from God. Pray for discernment. Pray to see, "How am I

being called to God? Is this truly of God? Is this truly of the Commandments that He has given to me?"

Know that the Lord is for you. Look at the words that we prayed in the Psalm today: "Your ways, oh Lord, make known to me; teach me your paths, guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior" (Ps 25:4-5). Those words are fulfilled in Jesus. He is our God and Savior. He teaches us. "Good and upright is the Lord, thus **he shows sinners the way.**" (Ps 25:8). Each and every one of us here is a sinner. It is Jesus who shows us the way. It is Jesus who leads us to the Father. It is Jesus who leads us to that infinite happiness for which all of us hunger.

Do not believe that life in Christ will be without suffering or without the cross. There is denial and there is suffering, but that suffering is rooted in love and obedience to a loving Father. That is why there is freedom in embracing it. There is freedom in saying "yes" to the Father. Jesus did not go to the cross for the sake of suffering. He went to the cross and denied Himself for the sake of love, for the love of the Father and for us. "Not my will, but your will be done" (Lk 22:42).

During these 40 days of Lent, as we wander through the desert, may we be confident of the presence of Christ in our midst. May we hear the words of Jesus spoken in our hearts. "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the Gospel." (Mk 1:15). May we always know that Jesus is with us, leading us along His paths and guiding us with His truth, for He is our God and our Savior.