

“In Adam, In Christ”

Matthew 4:1-11

Lent 1, Invocabit

February 28 – March 1, 2009

In the name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In the Garden of Eden man exalts himself to be a god in place of God. He succumbs to the temptation of the devil, and eating of the forbidden fruit he receives death. But in the sin-cursed wilderness God humbles Himself to become man in place of man. Jesus does not eat but fasts and bears the onslaughts of the devil for us that we may be restored to life. In the Garden man tries to win independence from God, to be his own master, to be in charge of his own life, and in the end man cuts himself off from all that is good. But in the wilderness, Jesus depends and relies on His heavenly Father, submitting to His will and looking to Him for all that He needs, in order that He might restore us to faith and to a right relationship with God. In the Garden, the tame and gentle animals that God had created fell under the curse of man's rebellion, turning against one another and against man himself. But in the wilderness, Jesus lived among the wild beasts (Mark 1:13), that He might experience the full effects of the fall and restore His creatures and renew all of creation.

It is for this reason that the Scriptures refer to Jesus as the second Adam. He came to undo and overcome the work of the first Adam. You and I are one with the first Adam. His blood flows through each of us. His rebellion dwells within us. We have participated in his sin. We are of the same nature. In Adam, we die. However, in Christ, we live. For we have also been made one with Christ through our baptism into His body. Jesus bore the sin of our old Adam and put it to death that we might be raised to a new life with Him. Now Christ's blood flows through each of us who have been made to be His members, particularly as we receive His blood and body in the Sacrament. God's love and faithfulness dwell within us by His Word and Spirit. St. Peter says that we have actually been made to be partakers of the divine nature through the flesh of Christ (2 Peter 1:4).

In a very real sense, then, all of you Christians have two natures. By birth, you have the nature of Adam. By rebirth in baptism, you have the nature of Christ. That's why being a Christian is a struggle. Those two natures are at odds. Your old Adam continues to war against Christ and rebel against His saving work. For the work of Christ means the

death of Adam. Your old nature doesn't want to die. You still want to go your own way and do your own thing. The old Adam hangs around your neck until the grave. That's why Lent is such an important season of the church year. It reminds us that being a Christian is always about repentance and forgiveness, daily going back to your baptism, that the old Adam in you may be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that Christ may daily emerge and arise in you to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

It was immediately after His baptism that Jesus was sent into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. This should teach us something about our own baptism into Christ. Many think of baptism just as a nice religious ceremony, a family event usually involving a cute little baby. We need to realize, however, that baptism puts us into the middle of a battle. For the baptized have been made to be enemies of the devil. In the water God snatches us from Satan's kingdom. The devil doesn't like to lose his slaves. The sign of the cross inscribed on our foreheads and our hearts is a like a target. Only by the Word and Spirit of Christ will we be protected from the schemes of the evil one. We should all pray more fervently and more diligently that God would guard us and all the baptized from the power of the devil.

Let us give our attention then briefly to the devil's temptation of Christ and how Christ won the victory for us over our enemy. Satan came to Him and said, **"If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread."** This first temptation is the temptation of the flesh. Jesus is hungry, so the devil tempts Him to use His power to gratify His desires. But the Father had not given Jesus to do that. It was His Father's will that Jesus hunger on our behalf, that we might learn to hunger for Him who is the Living Bread.

The devil tempts us also to gratify our desires and lusts and passions. **"Go ahead,"** he says. **"What's the harm?" "Doesn't God want you to be happy? Doesn't He want you to enjoy yourself? If it feels good, do it."** But whatever the devil gives is temporary and short-lived; the pain that follows endures and lasts and multiplies. The devil doesn't dish out happiness and freedom but addiction and slavery.

Notice also how the devil seeks to plant doubt with his temptation. He says to Jesus, **"If you are the Son of God..."** At His Baptism the Father had just said, **"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."** Now Satan wants Him to doubt that Word of God. **"After all, if You really were the beloved Son of God, would the Father put You through these 40 days? Look at You; you don't look like the Son of God, all weak and weary. Are you sure about who you are?"**

This is how the devil attacks you, too. **"If you are a child of God . . ."** Satan wants you to doubt the Word of God spoken at your baptism. **"If you really were a beloved**

child of God, would God allow you to go through the things you've gone through? And look at you, sinner; you don't look like a Christian. Are you sure you're forgiven? Are you sure you're going to heaven?"

This is really the most evil of the devil's temptations, to doubt your relationship with God, to doubt the Word that God has spoken to you. Remember the serpent's question to Eve in the Garden, "**Did God really say . . .?**" We usually think of temptation in terms of physical things. But the even greater temptation is spiritual, the temptation to unbelief, the temptation to take your attention off of God's Word and to believe other sources. In the Small Catechism, Luther placed the three temptations in this order: first, false belief; then, despair; and then, other great shame and vice. The vices come last; issues of faith come first.

So when the devil assaults your conscience and reminds you of your sins, fight him off by clinging to Christ and His Word. Don't let Satan force you to dwell on your miserable self. Instead, focus on your merciful Savior. Know that all of your sins were swallowed up in the wounds of Christ on the holy cross. Anything that the devil can charge you with, Christ answered for at Calvary. With the Word and name of Jesus you can put the devil to flight. In this way Christ truly is your mighty fortress.

In response to the devil's first temptation, Jesus replies, "**It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'**" Jesus drives back the devil here and every time with the Scriptures, the solid rock of the Word. Our real life comes not from bread or any other earthly sustenance but from God's words and speaking. and give us life. The Word proceeds from the mouth of God to you, "**I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine.**" "**I forgive you all your sins.**" "**This is My body and blood given and shed for you for the remission of sins.**" Feeding on that Bread of Life, we live.

Jesus quotes Scripture, and so the devil, in his craftiness also quotes Scripture. He took Jesus up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "**If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written, 'He shall give His angels charge over you,' and 'In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.'**" The devil has here what seems like a holy idea. God says that His angels will protect you. So let's see if it's true. Jump from the roof of the temple. But testing God like that does not flow from faith but from unbelief. It's an attempt to manipulate God and make Him do your bidding. Unbelief demands outward displays of power to prove that God is really with you. Beware! That is the religion of the devil. Jesus said, "**It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'**"

Don't ever forget that the devil is very good at religion. He can quote the Bible with the best of them. But his religion, his Bible-quoting is always a perversion of the truth. It has the appearance of godliness and holiness and morality, but it is devoid of the grace of God, or it perverts God's grace and mixes it with man-made righteousness. The devil laughs at the naiveté of those who think that it doesn't matter what religion you are as long as you're sincere. The devil doesn't mind if people are religious. He is the founder of Mormonism and Islam. He invented prayers to Mary and the saints. He is the author of all sorts of Pharisaical programs of man-centered holiness. What he doesn't like is the cross of Christ-if people trust not in their own merits but in the merits of Jesus alone for forgiveness.

Finally, the devil took Jesus up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. He said to Him, **"All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me."** This was more than a wicked invitation for the Creator to bow down to the creation, this was an attempt by the devil to get Jesus to bypass the cross. **"You want to reclaim and redeem the world, fine. But don't do it the hard way through suffering and dying. Do it my way. Do homage to me and it's all yours. You can have all the glory right now."** But Jesus said to him, **"Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.'"** Jesus took the path to Calvary, the only path that would truly ransom you from the power of the devil. By the shedding of His holy blood, Jesus released you from Satan's grip and purchased you as His own.

Today's Gospel marks the beginning of our Lord's victory over the devil. Jesus went face to face with the devil as our representative and our substitute. He was not defeated. He was tempted in every way just as we are, yet without sin. Christ's triumph over Satan now counts as our own. When we face temptation, we look not to our own strength and will but to Him who vanquished the enemy in the wilderness and crushed his head at Calvary.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.