

**March 6, 2022**

Dear Friends,

“When the devil had finished every temptation (of Jesus) he departed from him—for a time.” We are all familiar with the famous Arnold Schwarzenegger line from the movie *The Terminator*: “I’ll be back.” Well Satan says the same thing to Jesus. The temptations of Jesus are recorded in several of the gospels. I believe they are recorded because God wants us to know that when his Son became incarnate he was “like us in all things, but sin.” In all things means that he knew weakness, ignorance, confusion, the effect of other people’s sin on his life, and was even subject to temptation, because you and I are subject to temptation.

But, in our own minds we think: “How real could those temptations be given that Jesus was God’s Son and had access to that power? The enemy is wily and crafty and subtle in his temptations of us. Same for Jesus. But the enemy is no match for Jesus. The evil one comes when Jesus is very much weakened by his arduous fasting. The enemy thinks that is the best time to try to tempt. And the enemy will try various means to tempt Jesus to take advantage of his relationship with the Father, or use his power to contradict what the Father established in his original creation (in the original creation stones do not become bread), or to take the easy and popular way of great acclaim and celebrity. None of that has any effect on Jesus. He may be weakened but he is still strong enough. Satan goes away but he will bide his time. For a moment when Jesus is even weaker. But before we go there remember this. Each of the temptations begins with the same expression: “If you are the Son of God...” It is about power and identity.

When does the enemy return. In Gethsemane when Jesus is in agony and his own apostles abandon him. He is hovering. Jesus is carried off. But not yet. The next morning when Jesus is lashed with whips and scourges many times, the blood flows freely from his body, but still Satan does not strike. Then there is the carrying of the cross. Will Jesus even survive to Calvary? But the enemy does not yet tempt again. Then Jesus is nailed to the cross and hoisted before all the world. Mocked. Cursed. Spat upon. His life blood oozing out of his body. People jeering at him. Right then. Jesus will never be weaker. And how does the temptation begin? “If you are the Son of God come down off that cross. And we will believe.”

That’s what Satan was waiting for. Jesus actually had the power to come off that cross. He could walk on water and feed the five thousand with a few loaves of bread. He could raise the dead himself and cure so many. The power is right there. “Jesus, use it for yourself. To end the pain.” Jesus cries out, “My God, my God why have you forsaken me?” Does Jesus think that he has to take things into his own hands? Is that the temptation? “Use your power for yourself. That’s what we humans do. Aren’t you really one of us?” To me, this is a very real temptation. It is very real because it takes all of Jesus’ power NOT to come down off that cross. It took all his power to allow himself to remain nailed there—even to the point of his death.

Jesus never gives in to the enemy. Jesus only gives in to the Father. But, my friends, he was really tempted. In a way that we can barely understand. And he resisted. Because. He. Love. You. Sometimes we really do have no idea.

Peace

Msgr. McHenry