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Chancellor's Update

Temptation Awaits, but He Shall Overcome

As we pass from the season of penance into the joy of Jesus' resurrection, we must be mindful of our great Enemy, even in our mirth. We come forth from our forty days of fasting, penance, and prayer into feast and celebration, strengthened in faith by our time away from the distractions of this world. We are justified in our happiness on Easter, for, if we have given of ourselves honestly, the Lord has used this time to strengthen us and grow us closer to him. St. John Chrysostom, in his homily for the First Sunday of Lent, cautiously reminds the newly baptized in his congregation that while rejoicing in one's new (or *renewed*) gifts of the sacrament, "no one should be shocked if...he suffers even severer temptation, as though something strange had happened."

Why does this happen? Why after our long time of sacrifice can we expect to receive even stronger temptations? Like the servant given talents by his master, we are expected to exercise these graces so that we may avoid the stern condemnation of *wicked and slothful servant!* (Matt. xxv.26). Chrysostom states it simply: "This is the reason you received arms; not to stand at ease, but to fight. And God will not prevent temptations from rushing against you." He goes on to offer five reasons why God, at first, allows us to endure these temptations.

First, that "you may learn how stronger you are now than before." It is good for an athlete or a soldier to see the effects of his hard work and training, and the only way to do so is in combat or competition. **Second**, that we may learn prudence, "so as not to be overbold because of the greatness of the gifts you have received; for temptation will steady you." The Devil seeks to make us *fall* and never more strongly than when we have been *raised up* by God's grace. **Third**, that the "evil demon, who is uncertain whether you have renounced him or not, may not be left in doubt, through this test of temptation, that you have abandoned him, and wholly renounced him." Msgr. Paul J. Glenn, paraphrasing Aquinas in the *Summa* (Bk. Ia, Q. 57), states, "the secret thoughts of a man and his inner acts of free will are known only to himself and God" (*A Tour of the Summa*, p.49). Therefore, demons (as well as angels) cannot know our inner thoughts and will unless we should freely open ourselves to them. God allows their question to us in the form of temptation that our answers may be firm and resounding. **Fourth**, for the purpose of making us stronger, and that we may be "more tempered than steel," for it is only by fire and motion that steel is made, not by cold and stillness. **Finally**, and most importantly, the Lord allows temptation to come upon you so that "you may receive a kind of indication of how precious is the treasure you have been given. For the devil would not have attacked you had he not seen you now held in honour." Christ says the devil is a *thief* and that he *comes to steal, and slay, and destroy* (John x. 10). Remember always that the greatest of thieves does not try to steal what is worthless, but that which is priceless.

In light of these trials, do not be scandalized, for we have been given all we need (and more) to endure them. Saint Paul entreats us vigorously, regarding our own weakness in temptation; saying *may no temptation take hold of you but such as man is equal to. God is faithful and will not permit you to be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also give you a way out that you may be able to bear it.* (1 Cor. x. 13). Like Chrysostom, in the second of his five reasons, he also reminds us never to grow disdainful for the greatness of the gifts we have been given, as did the Jews of the Old Testament. *Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them tempted, and perished by the serpents. Neither murmur, as some of them murmured, and perished at the hands of the destroyer. Now all these things happened to them as a type, and they were written for our correction, upon whom the final age of the world has come. Therefore, let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.* (1 Cor. x. 9-12) Ever mindful of our pride, we should **never** seek out temptations, even in earnest desire to prove our faithfulness to the Father. Persist in obedience to the law, and *pray, that you may not enter into temptation.* (Matt. xxvi. 41) Chrysostom elaborates, “For this reason the Evangelist speaks of Jesus as, not going, but as being *led*; and this was according to the design of our salvation: implying that we are not as it were to leap into temptation, but, if we are led there, to stand firm against it.”

To overcome the devil, as Christ showed us on the Cross, is never a matter of strength, but only a matter of grace. Too easily do we give in to temptation, frightened by the devils’ incessant taunts. Should we forget in times of trouble, let us remember that *God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that those who believe in him may not perish, but may have life everlasting* (John iii. 16). If the Father gave us His only Son on Good Friday, will He suddenly forget you in your times of need? Of course not! God has given us Himself, Christ Jesus, as an example for how to repel even the strongest of temptations.

In response to His third and final temptation, Christ utters simple words “with great mildness”: *Begone, Satan!* (Matt. iv. 10). As Chrysostom explains, Christ responds in this way “so that He may teach us that we are to overcome the devil, not by wonders, but by patience and long-suffering.” So great is His power, that He is not even stirred to anger, uttering “a command rather than a castigation,” for castigations are uncertain, but commands have the certainty of power behind them. “Be not troubled, and do not let yourself be carried away by fury, but reply with calmness, giving that answer which you have just now heard your Lord make: *Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.*” Our response must always reside in the confidence of Christ’s promises that *all power in heaven and on earth has been given to me* and that *I am with you all days* (Matt. xxiii. 18-20). Lest you may fear that your gentle response will not show the strength of your resolve, know that Christ conquered Satan and the entire world as a Lamb, not a Lion.

So let us go forth from these forty days of fast and penance with the knowledge our great victory is Satan’s ultimate defeat, that by our humble subservience to the Lord, we may become as the angels in heaven, and greater even than he who would have our ruin. For all glory and honor is due unto Our Lord Jesus Christ, who has risen this day from His tomb to bring us into the glory of His Kingdom. Alleluia!

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