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## Chancellor's Update

### Jesus' Lenten Meditation for Us

Why is there a season of fasting and penance? Why does this season last for forty days and forty nights? Why did Jesus allow Himself to be tempted? The Church in her maternal solicitude answers those questions by returning to the dawn of history with the fall of man and later with some episodes in the journey toward the fulfillment of God's promise after the fall.

Chrysostom advises us that to effectively protect ourselves from the devil we should incline ourselves towards mortification instead of pleasure. So Jesus taught us to fast and set the length of the fast as forty days and forty nights in imitation of Moses (*And he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights: he neither ate bread nor drank water, and he wrote upon the tables the ten words of the covenant* (Ex. xxxiv. 28), and of the Prophet Elias (*The angel of the Lord said to Elias: Arise, eat: for thou hast yet a great way to go. And he arose, and ate, and drank, and walked in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights, unto the mount of God, Horeb.*) (III Kings xix. 7, 8). At a later date Augustine explains the reason for fasting. "When the contest with the tempter grows sharp, then must we fast, so that the body may discharge the Christian duty of warfare against the world, by penance, and the soul seek victory in humiliation."

*At that time Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert, (where He fasted for forty days and forty nights), to be tempted by the devil* (Matt. iv. 1). Saint John Chrysostom describes this scene by recalling the fall of man. Since the devil prefers to tempt us when we are alone, when he saw "the woman without her husband he tempted her in the beginning. When he had filled her with false promises, it was then he utterly ruined her, and brought unending misery upon her. He is an un pitying enemy, and he has set himself implacably to war against us. We do not seek our own salvation so eagerly as he seeks our ruin." Accordingly, an opportunity in which to tempt Jesus is provided for the devil when Jesus is *led into the desert.*" Acknowledging that the desert between Jerusalem and Jericho is the place where Adam figuratively was overcome and wounded by the demons, Gloss declares, "It was fitting therefore that Christ should defeat the devil there where the devil is said, figuratively, to have defeated man."

*And the tempter coming said to him: If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread* (Matt. iv. 3). Gregory describes the meaning of the first temptation. "For the ancient enemy tempted the first man by gluttony, when he persuaded him to eat the forbidden fruit of the tree...For he tempted through gluttony, when he said: *command that these stones be made bread.*" Chrysostom comments that the devil "begins where he had overthrown the First Man...the incontinence of the stomach...But Christ shows us that a man of virtue cannot be compelled by the tyranny of this appetite to do what is not fitting to do, but will rather endure hunger and not obey its command; teaching us that in nothing should we obey the devil."

Rhabanus comments on Jesus' answer to the devil. "If anyone ...does not eat of the Word of God, the same shall not live; for as the human body cannot live without earthly bread, so the soul cannot live without the Word of God...known through the Sacred Scripture."

In describing the second temptation, Gregory reminds us that when the devil tempted the First Man, he did so by vain glory, when he said, *you shall be as Gods* (Gen. iii. 5). Chrysostom tells us that the First Man, deceived and confused "did not firmly trust in God. For he (was) promised what was contrary to what God had said to them, filling them with empty hopes, leading them on to infidelity, and so were they cheated out of the happiness they possessed." Chrysostom describes the meaning of the second temptation. Knowing that holy men are able to resist hunger, the devil then tempted by vain glory, when he said: *If thou be the Son of God*. Gloss continues, "The devil ever leads up to *high places*, through vain glory, that he may then cast us down. So there follows: *And set him upon the pinnacle of the temple* (Matt. iv. 5)... In the seat of the Doctors he had already deceived many by this temptation; and so he thought that This Man, when placed there, might be caught by pride." Rhabanus advises, "Should anyone wish us to cast ourselves down, from the heights of truth and virtue to the depths of sin and vice, let us not listen to him."

Gregory describes the meaning of the third temptation. The devil tempted the First Man "by avarice, when he said: *knowing good and evil* (Gen. iii. 5)." Likewise, he tempted Christ by greed of place, when he showed Him the kingdoms of the world, saying: *all these will I give thee* (Matt. iv. 9)." Origen tells us, "He showed Him his own kingdoms, as he reigned in the world, that is, how some are ruled by fornication, some by avarice." Chrysostom continues, "The devil therefore may give riches, not however to whom he wills, but to those who desire to receive them from him." Gloss concludes, "See here the ancient pride of the devil. For as in the beginning he desired to make himself equal with God, so here he seeks to usurp the worship that is due to God, saying: *if falling down thou wilt adore me* (Matt. iv. 9)." Chrysostom describes Jesus' reaction to Satan. "But now, when the devil dares to usurp the honour due to God, He hardens His heart and rebukes him, saying: *begone, Satan* (Matt. iv. 10); so that from this example we may learn to bear with courage the injuries done to us, but never to endure to hear injuries against the honour of God. For to be patient in one's own afflictions is praiseworthy; but to pass over affronts to God is a grievous impiety."

So, as we continue the Lenten fast, we should remember the words of Saint Gregory. "A man is both living and a sacrifice when he has died to the desires of his body, though he has not departed from this life. It is the pleasure-loving body that leads us into sin; mortification leads us back to forgiveness. The parent of our death sinned against the commandments of our life, because of the fruit of the forbidden tree. We therefore who because of eating have fallen from the joy of paradise may, as far as we are able, return to it once more through fasting."

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