

## Sermon for Lent 1 (Invocabit) Sunday – Matthew 4:1-11

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

“Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.” In the temptation of Jesus, three things happened: 1. Christ was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness. 2. He was tempted by the devil. And 3. Christ overcame the devil.

Why was Christ led into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit? “To be tempted by the devil.” Why was it necessary for Christ to be tempted? The Scriptures clearly say, “... He had to be like his brothers in every respect, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because He Himself suffered when tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted.”

He was tempted in the desert by Satan for us. When did this temptation take place? It was immediately after His Baptism in the Jordan River by John. Why after being baptized, was He then led out to be tempted? Why then? Also, for us. Jesus’ temptation after Baptism shows us that a Christian’s life from Baptism to grave is nothing other than a daily duel and battle with the devil, the world, and the flesh, and that immediately after Baptism, we are placed by the Holy Spirit into the wild, vicious world and subjected to all kinds of trouble.

Therefore, in being a baptized child of God, we don’t have to seek out tribulation, adversity, persecution, trial, affliction, sickness, cross, and suffering. They’ll come to us. Think about this way: You have a body and soul and you’ve got to deal with people in this life. Give to each it’s due. Receive for yourself faith in God’s Word in order to feed your soul. Then give your neighbor the fruits of that faith: works of love and mercy. Attend to your vocation, your God-given station in life faithfully. Be the daughter God’s called you to be. Be the student He’s called you to be. Be the mom or dad He’s called you to be. In time, you’ll find and receive plenty of cross, suffering, tribulation, adversity, persecution, sleepless nights, hunger, toil, and labor. On Valentine’s Day, love has no greater definition than that! Be faithful to your calling and you’ll find trouble from your flesh, the devil, and the world without having to look for it.

When we cling to Christ in faith, then the battle begins in earnest. Faith is not simply peace. There’s a reason St. Paul calls faith a “fight.” When we fight the good fight of faith, our flesh fights against us. It can be said we’re our own worst enemies, because who’s closer to us than we ourselves? The world fights against us—it’s chock full of temptations and allurements to draw us from God. The devil fights against us. He is powerful. Satan uses all his skills, the same ones he used against our Lord in the wilderness: temporal and spiritual tribulations, temptation to deny God and self-assured on our own, and temptation to love this world.

We will never conquer the enemies to our faith by a mere feeling of security. We will conquer them by waging incessant warfare against them. Now is the time to fight the fight of faith. When it seems the battle has calmed, that there is peace, that the devil, the world, and our flesh have come to a truce with us, they are really massing their forces for a more powerful attack on our soul.

When an opposing army storms a city, they don't direct their attack against the most fortified parts of the wall. They attack where the walls are weak, where the ditches are shallow, and where the guard posts are unguarded. The devil, the world and our flesh wage this kind of warfare against us, aiming at our weakest and unguarded points. Whom will they not attack—since they approached the Lord of Glory Himself? If the devil sought to sift the apostles of Christ like wheat, do you think he'll fail to test us with temptation? Satan is vigilant—are you sleeping? He is preparing to damage your trust in Christ—aren't you going to ready yourself to resist them?

How do we fight this battle? First, we trust Christ's victory over the devil and death for us. And that means we don't trust in ourselves, our intentions, our uprightness and goodness, or how well we obey. We must not believe the cultural lie that tells us, "You have to believe in yourself" or that "The truth is found within you." "I'll take care of myself," we say. But what does God's Word say? "Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." "He who trusts in his own mind is a fool." Or better yet, "Our God is our Rock and our Shield." Look only to Him who bore the cross for us and be strengthened in real and lasting victory.

How do we fight this battle? Second, we arm ourselves against the devil with God's Word. When we face outward troubles: How am I ever going to pay for that? When will my condition go away? How long must I bear this pain? Gain strength from God's Word. Say with your Savior, "Be gone Satan! For it is written:" "Your heavenly Father knows that you need these things" and "What son is there whom a father does not chasten?" When we're afraid, when we're worried: What if he or she doesn't really like me? "Be gone, Satan! For it is written: Fear not, for I have redeemed you."

If the devil says, "You're supposed to be a child of God, why are you still a sinner?" "Be gone, Satan! For it is written: Christ came to save sinners." If the prince of darkness says: "You're supposed to be a child of God, so why are you so depressed? Children of God are supposed to be happy?" "Be gone, Satan! For it is written: Blessed are those who mourn!" Finally, are we tempted to believe that we can't pray rightly? Are we worried about our faith? "Be gone, Satan! For it is written: "Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the One who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us." God has defeated all our enemies. He spoke and it was done. What more needs to be said? Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠