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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As we begin to traverse this renewed journey of Lent again, let us remind ourselves what Lent truly means, and what our response to this liturgical season *should* be.

We may begin by reading through the very first verses of the Gospel According to Mark. The scene begins with the Baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist. While this is a very familiar scene to all of us, I wonder how many of us have considered the importance of what is subsequently narrated to us after His baptism: “**The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts**” (Mark 1:12-13). How interesting it is that upon Jesus’ first episode of His public ministry, that instead of immediately congregating with the people and preaching the truth, Jesus is led *away* from the people, to be tempted in the desert. One might posit that this could just be a kind of textual anomaly by Mark, but we see the same thing in Matthew’s account (Matt 4) and in Luke’s account (Luke 4). As any good student of Sacred Scripture knows, whenever we see **repetition** in the Bible, that’s when ALL of our senses should be perking up, for that is a particularly important message God is trying to convey to us. Therefore, I hope we are all listening.

We then see in the accounts of Matthew and Luke, that Jesus was then tempted by Satan three times—we could now easily begin a discussion about the significance of each of those temptations, but I shall leave that for another time. Let us focus instead on what Satan was trying to do with Jesus. Was he not attempting to get Jesus to turn into *Himself*, and to make *Himself* the most important thing? Was Satan not showing Jesus all the things He could **have** and **do**, if He would only follow the counsel and promises of Satan? Of course. One again might say, however, “But this is JESUS! He *IS* God! Why would it be bad for Him to recognize Himself as the most important thing?”

While of course Jesus, by virtue of the hypostatic union (i.e., the fact that at Jesus’ conception, the divine nature assumed, and thus became in union with His human nature), is in fact God, we must not forget that He is the SON of God. And by being the Son, He must also have a Father—not a Father Who is greater than the Son by nature, but a Father who is greater than the Son by RELATION. And because the Father is greater than the Son in this respect, Jesus knows all too well, that what is demanded of Him as the Son of God, is total and uncompromising HONOR for and **OBEDIENCE** to the Father. If Jesus could or would not do this, then the Father would never have said this about Jesus: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Matt 3:17).

How then does Jesus conclude Satan’s interaction with Him? He exclaims to him, “Begone, Satan!” (Matt 4:10). This is no minor point. Even after experiencing the natural trials of being out in the desert for forty days, **hungry, thirsty, tired, dirty, possibly physically hurt, possibly sleepless**, etc., instead of giving in to temptations, and yielding to the voice of Satan (or to the “voice” of all temptations), Jesus commands Satan to leave Him, because in order for Him to be righteous in His Father’s sight, He knows He cannot serve two masters (c.f., Matt 6:24). He cannot truly LOVE and SERVE God the Father, yet serve the master of temptation and evil, at the same time.

And thus, Jesus gives us the very principle of what it means, what it takes, and what must be our STARTING POINT, in order to be a disciple of God: “**You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve**” (Matt 4:10), hearkening to Deuteronomy 6:13, which is just a simple development of the **First Commandment**.

In our desire to unite ourselves to Christ, especially during His time in the desert, let us reflect more on WHY we choose to give up certain things in our daily life that are temptations *for us*, and how we can move away from serving ourselves, in order to turn to the One divine Being Who *alone* is able to turn our sufferings (with our cooperation) into moments of great glory and triumph!

May God be with all of you!

In Christ through Mary,
Mr. Andrew M. Steele