

First Sunday in Lent, Gospel Year C

Jesus. Not Like Us. For Us.

Luke 4:1-13

First Sunday in Lent

Analysis by Marcus Felde

1 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, 2 where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. 3 The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." 4 Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.' " 5 Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. 6 And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. 7 If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." 8 Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.' " 9 Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, 10 for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,' 11 and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.' " 12 Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' " 13 When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.



DIAGNOSIS: Jesus Is Not Like Us (and vice versa)

To find the word of diagnosis or criticism (Steps 1-3) in this passage about the Holy One, the Son of God, we have to notice that he is not like us. His success when tempted makes us ashamed of how we fail.

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Cheating!

The moves Jesus makes when he is tested by the devil are the right moves. But we make the wrong ones. Following the order of the temptations: We allow desperation to outweigh the requirement of faithfulness, meaning we can't wait for God. We are dazzled by opportunities to take authority, meaning we can't wait for God. We reduce God to a lapdog by our vestigial notion of faith—surely he'll take care of us! Case studies are invited. (You probably disappointed God by cheating in all three of those ways this month; but certainly in this life.)

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Centering! (In Self, Not God)

In each case, as we diagnose ourselves by comparing our own failed lives to the mirror of Christ's perfection, what it boils down to is this: God is not God to us, when we are at the center. Eccentricity may be fun if we are talking about food or music tastes or the clothes we wear; but not loving God with our whole hearts and with our whole souls and our whole minds we put our confidence in that which is not God—ourselves or something equally vain.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Collapsing

The air of this reading is menacing. Jesus is at the brink of death. He is beyond weak and starving. How much more can he take before he perishes altogether? As readers sympathetic to him, we fear that something bad could happen to him, whether he succumbs to temptation or surmounts it. The Law of God pervades the reading as the source of the threat. Can this person, or this world, or we be saved? Not unless maybe, just maybe, in the person of Christ and at a more "opportune time" (v. 13)?

PROGNOSIS: Jesus (the One Who Is Not Like Us) Is for Us

**Step 4: Initial
Prognosis (Eternal
Solution):
Cheater!**



We are special readers of this frightening pericope. We knew before we started reading this passage that Jesus would “cheat” the devil by receiving, not from him but from God, 1) bread enough to share with the world; 2) dominion over the nations; and 3) resurrection from the dead! Because of Christ, God offers us what the devil only pretends to offer, because the devil has been defeated and has no power over us. In only being willing to submit to the will of his Father in heaven, by not “jumping the gun,” Jesus bought us time—and eternity.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Centered

“You shall worship (be centered on, base your life only on) the Lord your God, and serve only him.” Worshiping Christ, believing the promise, we find ourselves radiating from a new Center. Turning in obedience to Christ, we give our backsides to the devil, just like him.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Celebrating

We do not live (or conspire) to get bread, or keep safe, or get

power. We are fueled by the bread we have eaten, comforted by the knowledge that the Lord is our shepherd, and strengthened for his service. "Serve only him" means we live in thrall to no one and yet everyone, as we freely care for God's children.