

Read also Deuteronomy 6:6-19. Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.

Our liturgist read this from Psalm 91:

Those who live in the shelter of the Most High will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty. This I declare about the LORD: He alone is my refuge, my place of safety; he is my God, and I trust him. For he will rescue you from every trap. . . . If you make the LORD your refuge, if you make the Most High your shelter, no evil will conquer you. For he will order his angels to protect you wherever you go. (Ps 91, excerpts)

Sounds really wonderful. Rest. Refuge. Rescue. God is good! God is trustworthy. If you make the Lord your God, you gain great benefits.

During the wilderness temptations, Satan quoted part of that passage to Jesus. The problem is Satan did not believe it. We know that Satan did not believe it because Satan always questioned God's motives. Satan saw God not as good, but as manipulative of human beings:

The devil said to Eve, "Did God *really* say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?" to which she replied, "Of course we may eat fruit from the trees in the garden. It's only the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden that we are not allowed to eat. God said, 'You must not eat it or even touch it; if you do, you will die.'" Satan said, "You won't die! God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil." (Genesis 3:1-6)

Unfortunately, the woman was convinced. She followed Satan's skewed interpretation. That gives you a slight picture of what the devil is like.

Now hear the second temptation of Jesus:

Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" (Matthew 4:5-7)

Let's explore why this is a temptation for Jesus and for us.

Imagine Jesus' love for God's temple, the center of the Jewish faith. Remember Jesus entering there, making a whip and driving out the money changers while shouting, 'This is a house of prayer, not a den of thieves.' Do you remember how Jesus healed a man's hand on the Sabbath? Do you remember Jesus teaching in the temple daily? Do you remember after Jesus died, the curtain in the temple was torn from top to bottom? The temple signified God's presence with God's people.

So Satan centered the second temptation at the temple.

He challenged Jesus to rise up and twist God's arm by jumping off the temple roof. He tempted Jesus to force God's hand to rescue him. Why?

Jesus immediately saw this as a dangerous temptation. He said: "Do not put God to the test."

If you consider the Deuteronomy passage from which Jesus answered, and which we read earlier, it speaks of not testing God as the people did at Massah, the people whined at Moses because they were thirsty. They whined so vehemently, Moses believed they would stone him.

Jesus said, “Do not put God to the test like they did.”

Have you taken a child to MacDonalD’s and got a kid’s meal and an ice cream cone. They ate three fries, dipping the fries in the ice cream. After patiently waiting you finally throw away all the leftovers and leave. Forty-five minutes later you hear from the back seat of the car, “I’m hungry,” in this most whinny voice.

That’s what God experienced. In the desert food and water were extremely scarce and the Israelites had to rely on God. They got tired of not having water on demand, and bored with manna. They did not hide this fact. *We are tired of the same old thing day after day. We want meat! We want a nice Merlot or maybe a Shiner. Oh, why did we follow this Moses here? We should have stayed in Egypt.*

They whined and complained and threatened to return to Egypt. That is what God calls “testing Me.”

You ever been tested? Have you ever said to someone, “You are getting on my last nerve.” Testing God is getting on his last nerve.

Jesus answered Satan, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

God offers his angels to protect us, but when Satan said, “push the envelope, you must ask yourself, does God owe you that?”

Let’s say Jesus left the wilderness and began his ministry by throwing himself off the pinnacle of the temple, and God rescued him. What would happen?

Jesus would have instant followers. But the followers would not be about the heart, or about love for God; it would be because of Jesus’ fame. It would be for sensationalism.

People would follow the miracle not the Lord. It would be all about the desire—I want you to heal me, change this or that about me, fix this or that, make me rich, pay off my debts, solve my marriage problems. Name it and claim it. Or, as Rev. Alice Ridgill says, “Blab it and grab it.”

But it would have nothing to do with a relationship with Jesus. God would become a Pro re nata (PRN). Have you ever been given a prescription that says “take as needed,” or if needed. Take as the situation arises—like asthma.

So following a spectacular Jesus who was into giving a show would result in exactly the opposite of what Jesus knows we need.

If you don't have a need for God to fill, then you would not talk to God. You would just call him up when you need him. You would make God a genie in a bottle who you call on only when you need something.

It puts you in the driver's seat. Isn't that what Satan's all about? He wants to be like God.

That's not what it is all about. God is God of all life, all the time.

The children of Israel had an attitude problem in the desert. They forgot all about the FREEDOM they had been given miraculously. They forgot that they were headed to the Promised Land. God had provided houses they did not build, vineyards they did not plant, orchards they did not fertilize, cities that were there and waiting for them. You can probably relate, when you think of what you provide for your children because you love them.

God's children were ungrateful children.

Jesus had a vision for so much more. He wants you to be inspired, motivated, empowered children. So Jesus would not be an ungrateful Son of God. He had the courage to resist fame.

Jesus also said, "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does." (John 5:19)

It is a temptation for you and me to seek popularity or notoriety or being spectacular, just as it was for Jesus. But then you will use the people around you rather than loving them, whether at work or at home.

It will be all about you.

Jesus said, "I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me." (Jn 5:30b)

Here's how Jesus helps you to resist that temptation:

"Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me. . . .⁷ But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted!" (John 15:4, 7)

He kind of turns it upside down, you see. You remain close to him, in touch with him, inspired by him, and then ask. Isn't that wonderful to be able to ask Jesus for anything you want? You can do that appropriately when you are guided by His will in His Word.

Remember, Jesus sees the future, not just the immediate:

For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. (Jn 3:16)

God had a better plan than a Messiah who became famous drawing people by sensationalism.

When you have a big plan for your life, give it to the Lord rather than proceeding without Him. God may delay your plan. God may shape your plan. God may even take it away. But rest assured, God's plan is always better in the long run.

Satan said, "If you are the Son of God, jump off the building and God's angels will bear you up."

But Jesus said, "Father, if you are willing, please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine." Then an angel from heaven appeared and strengthened him. (Luke 22:42-43)

The angel indeed showed up for Jesus, who was right in the will of His Father, saving millions of us, more of us than the stars in the skies, blessing us with a future home of houses we do not build, vineyards we have not planted, orchards we did not fertilize, a city there waiting for us to enjoy forever.

Isn't God's way far better? Will you embrace it?

AMEN