This week, we began the season of Lent. During these 40 days, not including Sundays, some people would “give up” certain things or “privileges” that they cherish in life while others may take on new experiences intentionally (such as devotionals, fasting, meditation and prayer time, volunteer services...etc.) in order help them rekindle and reconnect their relationships with God. This is all part of our preparation and discipline of ourselves leading all the way to Holy Week.

On Ash Wednesday we remember that ***“from dust we come from, and from dust we shall return.”*** Many Christians, including the Protestants, received this ***visible sign of God’s invisible grace*** – a mark that signifies our own human frailty, our depravity, and our brokenness in light of God’s perfect plan for us. These 40 days of Lent also signify the wilderness journey that Jesus took, as He was being tempted by Satan, right after He was being baptized and as he was about to begin his public ministry.

In the passage that we read earlier, Satan wasted no time in putting Jesus to the test when he was alone out in the wilderness and was most vulnerable. But God would not allow His Son to go through all of this alone. God sent angels to attend with Jesus and to look out for Him. In some translations, this same word “to attend” was translated as **to serve,** **to take care of, or even to minister to**.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Jesus was ready for anything that might come his way. He was never alone while out in the wilderness. The Heavenly Father was with Him and He was also described as being “*full of the Holy Spirit”* and was “led by the Spirit” of God, as He entered into the wilderness.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The temptations or testings that Jesus went through were a sampling of what many of us struggle with in our daily lives. **These temptations test our spiritual discipline and our self-control.**

When the Spirit led Jesus out into the wilderness, God allowed it to happen. The Father had complete confidence of His Son of what he would say or do. Not only was Jesus fully God, He was also fully human, with flesh and bone, just like you and me. He has his human physical needs as well. But what differentiate Jesus from us was that He held his ground and did not yield into any of those temptations, whereas chances are, many of us would have probably succumbed into all of those temptations in life....temptations of **earthly physical desires**, **power** and our **devotion** and **allegiance** to our sovereign God. Jesus passed the tests and we didn’t. We have flunked.

Come to think of it, we all have our shares of tests and temptations that we must face and overcome in our everyday lives. We don’t have to look far to come across various forms of temptations through the media; the words that are coming out of our mouths and our thoughts; the music that we downloaded and allowed ourselves to listen to; the smell of a freshly baked cake right out of the oven; or simply the craving of enjoying your favorite dish in your favorite restaurants [now especially during Chinese New Year]; to even our human-to-human relationship with others, the list of earthly temptation goes on and on and on.

From the moment we wake up until we fall asleep, we’ve been constantly “taking it to the Test” in various forms. Sometimes we may even encounter temptations in our dreams. Some temptations bear greater consequences than the others. Some of us handle it better than others, while others may fail the tests miserably and fall flat on our faces.

God grants us a freedom of conscience to prayerfully discern what is acceptable and honorable in God’s sight, while we exercise our self-control, our personal discipline and obedience. But what Jesus had to put up with was more than these earthly temptations. His wilderness experience served us as a benchmark for our inner strength, courage and ability to withstand the presence of evil in this world.

**Evils are real in this world. They’re unavoidable, but they’re manageable.** We don’t need to look far in order for us to encounter evil face-to-face. Ever since the days of Adam and Eve, Satan was lurking and always waiting for the “opportune” time to strike, especially when we are in the most vulnerable moment of our lives. **We must stand on guard at ALL times not only when we are in the times of crises and challenges but also in the times of triumphs and celebration.**

As we read in our Old Testament passage earlier from the book of *Deuteronomy*, the Israelites had journeyed through the wilderness for 40 years and had now entered into the Promised Land – a land of *“milk and honey.”*  Unfortunately, the temptation to alienation of ourselves from God stood even more alarming when things were appeared to be going well. God warned the Israelites to never forget what God has done for them, who had brought them out of Egypt, across the wilderness. God had responded to their cries by giving them food, water, and shelter, and had delivered them into the Promised Land. God required the Israelites to offer the best of what they got (their First Fruits). Not out of their abundance but of the desire of their hearts.

Once again the fickleness of their faith and their allegiance had been tested, even in the midst of their abundance and false sense of security of the Promised Land. ***What about us today? How might Satan be testing us today that would draw us away from God?*** This is what the Season of Lent all about….a time of self-introspection and examination, a time of disciplined prayer and reflections.

The ultimate goal of Satan is to draw us further and further away from God. What better way to do that is when we feel good about ourselves, when we feel accomplished about our own personal successes and achievements. Very often we become our own worst enemy. Who needs God when we can be our own? We want to be in the driver’s seat! Remember what God commanded us: *Thou shall have no other God before me![[3]](#footnote-3)*

**Temptations make us more vulnerable of our own human weaknesses and shortcomings but they can also strengthen our level of endurance and perserverance**. We cast our dependence upon God and God’s mercy, especially during times of trials and challenges, when we simply don’t know who or where to turn. Jesus reassured us, ***“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."[[4]](#footnote-4)***

Through these series of temptations, God sent Jesus on this earthly mission so that He may experience what WE experience on a daily basis through our joys and sufferings. Satan knew our every weakness and he waited at the most “opportune” time to test us. We must stand on guard to defend and resist. Satan may come in the forms that we are least aware of, when we are most vulnerable and defenseless. Sometimes Satan may speak our language and disguise himself as our friends.

When Jesus experienced hunger, after not having eaten for 40 days, Satan tempted Him to turn the stone into bread. But Jesus responded by saying, “***Man does not live by bread alone.”[[5]](#footnote-5)*** **Strike One!**

Then knowing that we human crave for success, power and security, Satan offered Jesus everything that His eyes could see, as long as He bows down and worship Him. Again Jesus responded by saying, “***Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.”[[6]](#footnote-6)* Strike Two!**
 Finally Satan tested Jesus’ allegiance and fidelity to the Father by asking Him to jump from the temple’s tallest steeple and allow God’s angels to come and rescue Him from danger. Jesus responded, “***Do not put the Lord you God to the test.”[[7]](#footnote-7)*Strike Three! You’re OUT, Satan!!!**

In each temptation, Satan knew our very human weaknesses and craftily used words of scripture to support his reasoning. Being led by the Spirit, each time Jesus countered and rebuked Satan with the Word of God. Jesus was armed and ready, equipped with the Word of God for this spiritual confrontation with Satan. Without a doubt, Satan would come once again until another opportune time. Christ’s ultimate testing would be claimed by his victory over death through his resurrection.

During this season of Lent, God has invited us to examine our own spiritual journey. Where is God in our lives right now? Is God just some imaginary supreme “higher power” who sets things in motion remotely in our lives? Perhaps we once had a personal intimate relationship with God but over time, our relationship has drifted apart. Perhaps God is not as personal as before. Has Satan gotten a grip in our lives in preventing us from seeking intimacy with our sovereign God?

**In humility and obedience, Christ invites us to lay down our lives before Him and to check ourselves, along with ALL of our baggage at the foot of the Cross.** Through this season of Lent, may we rediscover our intimacy with God once again, through our constant prayers and meditations, as we **journey together from the ashes to the Cross.Jesus had already withstood the ultimate test for us on our behalf. Christ has already claimed victory over the sins of death.** Let us give thanksto God for God’s grace and mercy. In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *Mark 1:13* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Luke 4:1* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Exodus 20:3* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Matthew 11:28-30* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Deuteronomy 8:3* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *Deuteronomy 6:13* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *Deuteronomy 6:16* [↑](#footnote-ref-7)