

**“Jesus... was led by the Spirit into the wilderness.”**

***Lk 4:1***

We often view the Temptations of Christ as examples of how Our Lord was just like us. He suffered temptations just as we suffer temptations, although perhaps our attitude is slightly ambivalent: after all, wasn't He also God? Wasn't it easier for Him to resist temptations? As the Son of God surely His temptations could not possibly have been as strong, as threatening – as real, if you like – as the temptations we suffer, could they?

Part of us wants to believe that Our Lord is just like us and therefore understands what we have to go through when we suffer temptations; and part of us thinks that He must have had it easier than we do simply because He is also God.

The truth is both a little more nuanced and, at the same time, more reassuring.

First, we have to appreciate that *in His humanity* – and that is the key phrase – *in His humanity* Our Lord suffered very real temptations: having fasted for forty days He was genuinely hungry, and anything edible would have looked like food fit for a banquet, and, having been weakened by His fasting in a hot and dry and dusty desert the temptation to take the easy path to glory, and do His own will instead obeying His Father's will, would – *in His human nature* – have been a very real temptation: remember, the same thing happened in the Garden of Gethsemane when He prayed, 'If it be possible, let this cup of suffering pass me by.'

Oddly, at the same time, might He not have been tempted to rely on His mystical and divine powers and trust that the angels would look after Him?

Similarly, are we not tempted sometimes to indulge in material comfort whenever we feel weak, or discouraged, or lonely, to follow our own path rather than God's

path simply because it's easier, and, conversely, to trust in God's power when things are difficult rather than just getting on with the job in hand?

Second, because Our Lord's temptations were real, we can know that our God truly is very near to us, as it says elsewhere in the Book of Deuteronomy: what nation is there that has its god so near to them as our God is to us? (Dt 4:7). Our God has come down to earth – to be Emmanuel, to be God-with-us – so that we can draw strength from the facts that He is near to us and that He has suffered the same things that we suffer.

And yet at the same time it is also true that Our Lord is divine: He is God, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and the Holy Spirit: one of the Three Persons of the Holy and Undivided Trinity. This is the great paradox of our holy religion: Our Lord is both God and Man. He is not less God just because He is Man; and He is not less Man just because He is God. He is fully God and fully Man. Our poor finite minds struggle with this paradox but if we can accept it as an article of faith then all things might begin to fall into place.

As Man, Our Lord suffered very real and demanding temptations, and entered into our humanity to show us the way forward when we are tempted.

At the same time – and drawing on His divine nature – Our Lord accomplished something remarkable in His temptations.

The Father sent His Son into the world to reconcile a fallen human race with its Creator, to redeem that fallen race by entering fully into the consequences of that fall. Our Lord emptied Himself of all the appurtenances of divine glory (Phil 2:7) and entered into the full wretchedness of our sinful nature without becoming a sinner Himself. He was born into this fallen nature; He grew up in this fallen nature; He healed the damage in countless individuals by curing them and, in three cases, raising them from the dead; and He entered into the physical suffering and the mental anguish that follows on from mankind's alienation from its God: He suffered torture, humiliation, pain, and finally death. In everything He said

and did in His human nature, Our Lord took upon Himself the affliction of a fallen race so that He could ransom, heal, restore, and forgive that race. And during His temptations, this is exactly what He was doing.

This was no accidental meeting between the Son of God and Lucifer. The Holy Spirit had led Our Lord into the desert for exactly this purpose! In the desert, Our Lord went head-to-head with the devil and drew the worst attacks of the devil to Himself and away from a weak and vulnerable humanity. Our Lord took a hit for the team, as we might say these days. He bore the brunt of the devil's wrath on our behalf so that whatever we may suffer in life, it is certainly less that we would have suffered had Our Lord not done battle with the devil on our behalf and drawn his sting.

This is the God who is so near to us. This is the God who has come down to earth to be with us.

As we sing on Good Friday:

Holy is God. Holy and strong. Holy immortal One. Have mercy on us.