

The Gospel According to St. Matthew

Chapter 4

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil (Matthew 4:1).

There are some today who would wish that the Church's teaching on the existence of Satan and demons would go away. They would like the devil to just be a symbol of human evil. C. S. Lewis wrote in the preface of the *Screwtape Letters*: "There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight."

The Catholic Church has always and consistently taught of the existence of the real devil:

Lateran Council IV, stated in 1215: *"The devil in fact, and the other demons were created naturally good by God, but they have made themselves evil. Man then sinned at the suggestion of the devil"*

Pope Paul VI stated in a General Audience, November 15, 1972: *"Evil is not merely a lack of something, but an effective agent, a living spiritual being, perverted and perverting. A terrible reality. Mysterious and frightening. It is contrary to the teaching of the Bible and the Church to refuse to recognize the existence of such a reality, or to regard it as a principle in itself which does not draw its origin from God like every other creature: or to explain it as a pseudo-reality, a conceptual and fanciful personification of the unknown causes of our misfortunes"*.

Pope John Paul II, in his Catechetical Address for August 13, 1986: spoke of Satan's presence 'in the history of humanity' and his infernally clever strategy of inducing people to deny his existence so that he can get on with his wickedness undetected. The Pope concluded with a prayer: 'O Lord, let us not fall into the infidelity to which we are seduced by the one who has been unfaithful from the beginning'.

Pope Benedict XVI stated the following in *The Ratzinger Report*: "Whatever the less discerning theologians may say, the devil, as far as Christian belief is concerned, is a puzzling but real, personal and not merely symbolical presence.

"He is a powerful reality (the 'prince of this world,' as he is called by the New Testament, which continually reminds us of his existence), a baneful superhuman freedom directed against God's freedom. This is evident if we look realistically at history, with its abyss of ever-new atrocities which cannot be explained by reference to man alone.

"On his own, man has not the power to oppose Satan, but the devil is not second to God, and united with Jesus we can be certain of vanquishing him. Christ is 'God Who is near to us,' willing and able to liberate us: that is why the Gospel really is 'Good News.' And that is why we must go on proclaiming Christ in those realms of fear and unfreedom."

Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches: "Behind the disobedient choice of our first parents lurks a seductive voice, opposed to God, which makes them fall into death out of envy. Scripture and the Church's Tradition see in this being a fallen angel, called 'Satan' or the 'devil'. The Church teaches that Satan was at first a good angel, made by God: 'The devil and the other demons were indeed created naturally good by God, but they became evil by their own doing'" (CCC 391).

"The power of Satan is, nonetheless, not infinite. He is only a creature, powerful from the fact that he is pure spirit, but still a creature. He cannot prevent the building up of God's reign. Although Satan may act in the world out of hatred for God and his kingdom in Christ Jesus, and although his action may cause grave injuries—of a spiritual nature and, indirectly, even of a physical nature—to each man and to society, the action is permitted by divine providence which with strength and gentleness guides human and cosmic history. It is a great mystery that providence should permit diabolical activity, but 'we know that in everything God works for good with those who love him' [Rom 8:28]" (CCC 395).

And he (Jesus) fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was hungry (Matthew 4:2).

The use of the number forty is always used in the Bible in connection with some kind of trial or testing.

The rains of the Deluge in the time of Noah fell upon the earth for forty days and forty nights: (Genesis: 7 & 8).

Moses was on Mt. Sinai fasting for forty days before God gave him the stone tablets of the Old Covenant containing the Ten Commandments:

So he (Moses) was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he did not eat bread or drink water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments. (Exodus 34:28)

"When I went up to the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant which the LORD had made with you, then I remained on the mountain forty days and nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water . . . It came about at the end of forty days and nights that the LORD gave me the two tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant. (Deuteronomy 9:9 & 11)

When Elijah fled Queen Jezebel to the Sinai desert, he too fasted for forty days:

"So he (Elijah) arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mountain of God. (I Kings 19:8)

"It is written . . ." (Matthew 4:4, 4:7, 4:10).

With each of the temptation that the devil put before Jesus, our Lord responded by quoting Scripture to respond to and counter the evil one's deceptions.

It is very significant that the Scriptures quoted by Jesus come for the same source, Deuteronomy. Jesus quotes: "**Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God**" (Deuteronomy 8:3b). "**You shall not tempt the Lord your God**" (Deuteronomy 6:16). "**You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve**" (Deuteronomy 6:13).

For a period of forty days, Jesus was led out into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit to be tested by Satan. The passages quoted by Jesus were first preached to the people of Israel by Moses at the end of their forty years of testing. Moses exhorts the children of Israel in a previous verse, "And you shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments, or not. And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna. . ." (Deuteronomy 8:2-3a).

Jesus was about to begin to institute the New Covenant. Though he was and is both fully God and fully man, in the incarnation he completely “sympathise[d] with our weaknesses. . . in every respect [having] been tempted as we are, yet without sinning” (Hebrews 4:15).

- Israel was in the wilderness for forty years. Jesus was in the wilderness for forty days.
- Israel was hungry in the wilderness and was fed by God with manna. Jesus was hungry in the wilderness and was fed by every word that comes from the mouth of God. Also, he himself is the bread that comes down from heaven.
- Israel was tempted in the wilderness but failed. Jesus was tempted in the wilderness and was victorious.
- Moses was leading Israel in the wilderness to found the Old Covenant. Jesus was in the wilderness in preparation to found the New Covenant.

Through Jesus, God is about to deliver his people – the new Israel – not from slavery in Egypt but from slavery to sin and death. The promised land of the New Covenant will be the Kingdom of God which will soon be among the people of the Old Covenant in Jesus and his ministry and after his passion, death and resurrection be manifest to the world at Pentecost in the birth of the Church.

The Devil also Quotes Scripture: Out of Context!

“The devil . . . said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, ***‘He will give his angels charge of you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’***” (Matthew 4:6).

The devil is quoting, not from Deuteronomy, but from Psalm 91:11-12. Like many you use the Bible to teach false doctrine, Satan is taking the passage of Psalm 91 out of context, twisting it to a meaning contrary to God’s original intent. The devil uses the Psalm to tempt Jesus to force God’s hand for selfish motives. In its original context, the Psalm is declaring the faithfulness of God to protect and guide his servants and they strive against evil. It is very telling that the devil neglected to quote the end of Psalm 9:13. What will the faithful servant of God do? “. . . the serpent you will trample under foot.” This reminds us of the Protoevangelion in Genesis: “I will put enmity between you [the serpent] and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Genesis 3:15). This is the first prophecy of the coming of the Savior who will tread upon the head of the Serpent.

Psalm 91:9-13:

Because you have made the LORD your refuge,
the Most High your habitation,
no evil shall befall you,
no scourge come near your tent.
For ***he will give his angels charge of you***
to guard you in all your ways.
On their hands they will bear you up,
lest you dash your foot against a stone.

You will tread on the lion and the adder,
The young lion and the serpent
You will trample under foot.