

condition as Christians, and according to His holy intent, we must employ them for this spiritual combat.

And this use of God's grace is altogether in accordance with the purpose for which it is given, which is none else than to strengthen us in the combat against the temptations under which we labor. In our present state God gives us, not the grace of peace and immunity from temptation, as He gave to our first parents in Paradise, but the grace of victoriously combating against the enemies of our salvation. Such is the grace we stand in need of in our fallen state. For, the temptations to which we are continually exposed are as many assaults of the enemy, which we have to ward off by resistance and combat; and grace is given us to strengthen us in this conflict. If, then, we do not use the grace of God for this end, namely, by its aid to struggle against temptations, we neglect to employ it for the purpose for which it has been given, forgetful of the words of our blessed Lord: "I came not to send peace, but the sword" (Matt. x. 34); forgetful that heaven is the place of rest and peace, but earth is the field of battle.

Yet open combat alone is not sufficient; we must also use prudent tactics against so crafty an enemy. We must endeavor to tire and weaken him. Who is the enemy that presses hardest upon us in this struggle? It is, as the Apostle tells us, our own flesh, which is the slave of sensual appetites, and which is in continual rebellion against the law of reason and the law of God. This enemy is very powerful and dangerous, because he is so near to us, and forms part of us; because we naturally sympathize with him, and he moves against us not at once with open violence, but with wiles and treachery. If, then, the grace of God should lead us to victory, we must, according to the example of Our Lord, endeavor to deny, to weaken, and subdue the cravings of the flesh. A Christian who does not use these tactics in the spiritual combat, but indulges the flesh with all comforts, pleasures, and luxuries, flattering himself that the grace of God alone will save him, sadly deceives himself. For the grace of God, as St. Bernard tells us, begins its work by stimulating man to the mortification of the flesh and the suppression of its evil desires. As long as we do not attend to this first and chief impulse of grace, as long as we do not mortify the flesh, we cannot count on the effectual aid of divine grace.

Do not, then, beloved brethren, neglect the practice of Christian mortification, especially during the holy season of Lent. If mortification is necessary at all times, it is doubly so at this time, when the Church by her commandment makes it a strict duty. What moves the Church to do so is her motherly care for our salvation. Knowing our weakness, and the necessity of the mortification of the flesh, and our repugnance against this necessary means of salvation, she enforced it by a strict law during this holy season, in order to exercise us in this necessary warfare against the flesh. Let us, then, enter upon this season of penance and mortification in the spirit of the Church. Faithfully observe the fasting of the Church; thus you will obtain the triumph over the flesh; you will be victorious over your temptations in this life of combat, and lay up imperishable treasures for the life of everlasting rest and peace. Amen.

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TEMPTATIONS.

Rev. Julius Pottgeisser, S.J., *Sermons for Sundays and Chief Festivals of the Ecclesiastical Year*,
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"Jesus was led by the spirit into the desert, to be tempted by the devil."
—Matt. iv. 1.

IN the gospel of to-day our blessed Lord shows us how we should behave in temptations, and gives us many excellent lessons on the subject. For to-day, however, I shall select only two of these, which are contained in the text which I have quoted to you: "Jesus was led by the spirit into the desert, to be tempted by the devil." For, as Our Saviour retired into the desert only at the inspiration of the spirit of God, there to be tempted, it follows that we should not, of our own free will and without necessity, expose ourselves to temptations. But when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, we are told, the tempter came. In this fact we find the hint that, in the temptations into which we fall without our doing, we should not rely on the grace of God alone, but, according to the example of our blessed Lord, cooperate with God's grace. These two lessons are of the utmost importance. If we would follow them faithfully we would not so easily yield to temptations and endanger our eternal salvation. We shall, therefore, in the present discourse consider:

1. *Why we should not expose ourselves to wilful temptations;*
2. *How we should behave in unwillful temptations.*

I. WILFUL TEMPTATIONS.

Why should we not expose ourselves to temptations without necessity? The answer is plain: because, if we wilfully expose ourselves, we may very easily fall into sin. For, to overcome temptation in a salutary manner and to preserve ourselves free from sin, the assistance of God's grace is absolutely necessary. But we cannot count on this supernatural assistance in those temptations which we seek of our own free will.

1. I say that in order to overcome a temptation in a salutary manner, grace is absolutely necessary. Human will of itself, without the aid of grace, is unfit to obtain the victory. Such is the teaching of the Church. But by victory is understood here, of course, that mastery of which the Apostle speaks, the victory of him "that striveth lawfully" (II. Tim. ii. 5), the victory that is pleasing to God, and is a step in the path of our salvation; for, if one overcomes one temptation by another, or one sin or vice by another; if one overcomes the desire of revenge by avarice, and avarice by intemperance, and intemperance by sinful ambition, such victories are neither salutary nor meritorious, and may be achieved without the aid of supernatural grace. But to overcome those same temptations for God's sake, and in a manner pleasing to God, is the victory of grace and of faith, according to the

words of the Apostle St. John: "This is the victory which overcometh the world, our faith" (I. John v. 4). It remains certain, therefore, that without the grace of God we cannot overcome temptations in a manner pleasing to God.

2. I further maintain that in wilful temptations we cannot count on the assistance of God's grace, at least with any degree of security, because, in such a case, we do not avoid the occasion of sin. And, first of all, a man has no reason to hope for the assistance of God's grace, to overcome those temptations into which he wilfully thrusts himself. For, on what grounds could he hope, in this case? Is it that God is in duty bound to tender him His assistance? If that were so, grace, as the Apostle tells us, would no longer be grace, that is, a free and gratuitous gift, but a debt that God owed us. Or is it that God has promised him His assistance, and is bound by His fidelity to aid him? God has never made such a promise. Or is it because God is infinitely merciful? But, as long as one wilfully seeks the occasion of sin, he puts an obstacle in the way of the mercy of God, by making himself utterly unworthy of it, and incapable of receiving it. The man who wilfully exposes himself to temptation and will not avoid the occasion of sin has, therefore, no reason to hope for the assistance of God to overcome temptation. On the contrary, he has every reason to fear that God will withhold His grace from him, and that he will succumb and fall into sin. Why? Because God has expressly said that He will allow those to fall who rashly expose themselves to the danger: "He that loveth danger," He says, "shall perish in it" (Ecclus. iii. 27).

3. And why does God, in this case, withhold His grace from us? It is, as Tertullian says, that His grace may not be profaned. Else God's grace would be made the instrument of our levity and pride. For, if we could rely upon the assistance of grace, when we rashly expose ourselves to temptation, then we would take no precautions, but recklessly expose ourselves to every danger, according to the bent of our inclinations. But such behavior would be the greatest levity and pride, arising from our overweening confidence in God's assistance, which would be a manifest profanation of God's grace.

Besides, Almighty God, in this case, withholds His grace from us to punish our presumption. For, when we expose ourselves to temptation without necessity, we make ourselves guilty of the greatest temerity, because we tempt God; and that we do in three different ways.

First, we tempt God's infinite power, by expecting Him, without cause, to work a miracle in our favor. For, when a man expects of God that He should sustain him in temptation, while he himself does nothing towards his own preservation, he demands of Him something which is in direct contradiction with the ordinary laws of the distribution of divine grace. For the laws of grace demand co-operation on the part of man. He who wilfully thrusts himself into the temptation, presuming on God's grace, therefore, demands of God a true miracle of grace, a suspension of the ordinary laws of His grace in his favor. He therefore tempts God's omnipotence by his presumption. Need he wonder, then, that God chastises him by allowing him to fall into sin?

He tempts God, moreover, in regard to His infinite mercy. For the mercy by which God gives to man the necessary strength to overcome temptations, according to St. Augustine, is extended only to those who, without their own doing, fall into temptations. Now, he who brings on his own temptations expects that God should show him the same mercy which He has reserved for those who are tempted against their will and without their doing. He expects that God should draw the limits of His mercy according to his dictation, in order to bring him within its compass. Is that not presumption on God's mercy?

Lastly, the man who wilfully exposes himself to the temptation tempts the eternal truthfulness of God by downright hypocrisy. For he invokes the assistance of God against a danger into which he deliberately thrusts himself; calls upon the aid of God to overcome a sin which he does not wish to avoid. Is that not downright hypocrisy? May God not justly answer him, as Jesus Christ answered the Pharisees: "Why do you tempt Me, ye hypocrites?" (Matt. xxii. 18.)

Hence it is manifest that those who, without necessity, expose themselves to temptation, have no grounds to hope for the effectual assistance of God's grace, but have every cause to fear that He will abandon them to their own weakness and to the power of their enemy. Now, judge for yourselves, beloved brethren, whether the confessor may give absolution to such obstinate sinners. And yet, how many there are in our days who live in this lamentable state! How many drunkards there are who will not avoid the occasion, who will not keep out of the drinking-houses! How many cursers and blasphemers there are who will not shun the occasion of their impious vice, who will not give up their habit of gambling! How many slaves of impurity and adultery there are who will not flee the danger, who will not give up their companionships, their company-keeping, their immodest dances, and solitary and nightly meetings! All those are themselves to blame, if they succumb, as succumb they will, in the temptations which they themselves have courted. First, they must avoid the proximate occasion; then, and not till then, may they trust that God will not abandon them to their own weakness and to the craft of the devil. How you have to behave, when, without your doing, you come into temptation, it remains for me, in the second place, briefly to explain.

II. UNWILFUL TEMPTATIONS.

In those temptations which come upon us without our doing, Almighty God never fails to give us the necessary grace to overcome them. But, unless we co-operate with this grace, it remains fruitless, and we fall into sin notwithstanding. Therefore, in such temptations we must co-operate with the grace God so liberally extends to us. But how are we to do this? i. We must use those graces to combat against our selves and our evil inclinations, for it is the will of God that we should make that use of His graces which is in accordance with our condition and with the purpose for which the graces are given. But what is our condition in this life? It is, as the Scripture teaches us, a warfare. As Christians we are soldiers of Jesus Christ, and therefore it is our task to wage a continual warfare against ourselves and our immoderate passions. If, then, we would use God's graces according to our