

# **DAY 3**

**II - DESERT TEMPTATIONS: TWO PLATFORMS COLLIDE**

## II - DESERT TEMPTATIONS - TWO PLATFORMS COLLIDE

The scriptural passage of the Lord's temptations in the desert stages for us in the form of a personalized encounter something we all experience in our own lives: a pull toward God and away from self and a pull toward self and away from God. The order of the temptations in Matthew's narrative unmasks for us the dynamics of this pull toward self and away from God. It spells out for us the tempter's platform and strategy.

### DYNAMICS OF THE TEMPTATIONS

**FIRST TEMPTATION:** make sure your material needs are met, regardless of **how**, and here the how is making material needs an absolute priority. Sure, food is for us a very legitimate need and it is so also for Jesus. But the means proposed conceal a disregard for God's desire, which in Jesus' case would be a disregard for his mission as servant, as the *Servant of God* of Isaiah's book. It is a proposition for him to come instead as a pseudo-Messiah coming to meet all our material needs. Once we absolutize material needs as a top priority, we fall into the frenzy of wanting to have more as an end in itself, regardless of means used.

**SECOND TEMPTATION:** be sensational, be spectacular... after all, you need to be accepted. Being accepted is a legitimate desire in itself, for it is something that supports us psychologically and emotionally. The fallacy and slippery road lies in the reason for desiring acceptance and in the means to obtain it. Having a nice home or even a mansion in the suburbs, driving the latest luxury car, wearing an expensive outfit... all this confers status. In our society having more leads to being accepted more and this fosters a craving for having more, even beyond our legitimate material needs, which then becomes a craving for being considered more worthy of honor, regardless of the basis for such recognition. This is what lurks behind the second temptation as a further rung in the tempter's ascending ladder.

**THIRD TEMPTATION.** Once we consider ourselves so important, having so much recognition, the risk of absolutizing ourselves is huge, a risk of self-worship, of self-idolatry. Once we feel we have the clout conferred by recognition, we feel that we can decide for ourselves what is right and what is wrong. One does not need to be a totally depraved person. It actually happened to King David, *a man after God's own heart* [1Sam. 13: 14]. He was used to ruling what was right or wrong for others to do and so he decided for himself what was right for him on that occasion of sin.

So, the **dynamics** of the temptation, of the pull toward self and away from God, follows most often this path: desire to have more, leading to desire to be considered more, leading in turn to self-absolutizing, to become our own rulers.

### DYNAMICS OF THE PULL TOWARD GOD AND AWAY FROM SELF

By contrast the pull toward God and away from self is presented by Christ in his twofold message of deeds and words and, in responding to God's desire for us, we want to *listen to him*. Not surprisingly, here the dynamics of Christ's platform are the opposite of those unmasked before.

**FIRST PLANK:** not to seek having more. Christ is proposing a detachment from possessing, lest we be possessed, and he tells us: *blessed are the poor in spirit* [Mt. 5: 3]. Desire to possess can curtail freedom in choosing, since we may make choices only because they allow us to have more or we may avoid making choices because they might cost us losing what we already have or could acquire. Material self-sufficiency can obscure for us our need for God, our dependence on God's love and goodness. Not that riches be in themselves evil. The Patriarchs were certainly presented as blessed in riches, but they knew themselves in need of God. Jesus tells us repeatedly: *do not store up treasures for yourselves* [Mt. 6: 14] *...seek the kingdom of God first* [Mt. 6: 33].

**SECOND PLANK:** not to seek being considered more worthy of honor. Discipleship is not about recognition and power, as Jesus told John and James after their request for a top place of honor in the kingdom [Mt. 10: 42-45]. He also told his disciples: *I, who am Lord and Master... do the same, wash one another's feet* [Jn. 13: 14] *...the servant is not greater than the Master ...they will persecute you* [Jn. 15: 20] *...what will anyone gain in winning the world and forfeiting one's life?* [Mt. 16: 24-26].

**THIRD PLANK:** foster a humble self-understanding as one who is at God's service. Already in the book of Proverbs [30: 8] we are given this prayer-request to God: *give me neither poverty nor riches ...lest, being full, I deny you saying 'Who is God?'*. In the gospel of Matthew [26: 38-42] Jesus prays at Gethsemane: *not as I want, but as you, Father, want* and in the gospel of John this stance of being at his Father's service is expressed repeatedly: *my food is to do the will of the One who sent me* [4: 34] *...I came not to do my will, but the will of the One who sent me* [6: 38].

So, the **dynamics** of the pull toward God and away from self can be recognized as not seeking to have more, not seeking to be considered more worthy of honor and a humble self-understanding as being at the service of God.

A pertinent prayer at this point is to ask for light to recognize the reality of these two opposite pulls in our lives and to recognize the two opposite platforms and strategies.

## REFERENCE SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

### CHRIST'S PROGRAM

#### Mt. 5: 1-12

When he saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he had sat down, his disciples came to him. He began to teach them, saying:

*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.*

*Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.*

*Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.*

*Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.*

*Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God.*

*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.  
Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you [falsely] because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven. Thus they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

#### OTHER PERTINENT TEXTS

##### **Tempter's platform**

*Jn. 6: 26* Feed us again (first temptation)

*7: 2-8* Manifest yourself in Jerusalem.

*Mt. 27: 42* Come down from the cross and we'll believe in you.

*Jn. 6:14-15* They want to make Jesus king: honors (third temptation).

| popularity, sensationalism

| □(second temptation)

##### **Christ's platform**

*Mt. 6: 19* Do not store up treasures for yourselves on earth.

*10: 8* Not-for-profit: give freely what you have freely received.

*16: 24-26* What will anyone gain by winning the whole world and forfeiting his life?

*Lk. 9: 57-62* Up front: foxes have holes...

*Jn. 13: 13-15* Listen to my *deed*...Wash one another's feet.

*15: 20* If they persecuted me, they will persecute you.

*2Cor. 8: 9* Christ, being rich, became poor for us.

*Prov. 30:8* Give me neither poverty nor riches... Lest, being full, I deny you, saying, "Who is God?"

*Mt. 26:38-42* Gethsemane: not as I want, but as you, Father, want.

*Jn. 4: 34* My food is to do the will of the One who sent me.

*6: 38* I came not to do my will, but the will of the One who sent me.