

TEMPTED, REPENTANT, AND FORGIVEN

Learn from the examples set before you. This is what the apostle Paul is telling us in our Second Reading for today. Paul exhorts us to learn the lessons of our forefathers. Paul gives us examples of their being less than faithful to, and outright rebellious, against the Lord, for which God was not pleased. God was not pleased with His people on account of their unfaithfulness. Yes, they ate the same spiritual food; they were fed on the Word of God. The Word was read in their hearing, and they responded with one voice and said, “*All that the Lord has said we will do.*” They confessed their faith in and obedience to God, but they then fell away and worshipped other gods, a cycle constantly repeated in the Old Testament. The Lord would cause His wrath to fall upon His people so that they would repent of their sin and return to Him. The Lord demands total obedience to Him and repentance when we fail.

Look at what happened throughout Scripture to those who did not walk in the way of the Lord. There were the Flood, the plagues, the 40 years of wandering through the desert, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the exile into Babylon, among others. Paul mentions the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah when he says, “*Let us not sin sexually as some of them did! Twenty-three thousand fell on one day,*” (1 Cor. 10:8). Paul also cites the Israelites who grumbled against the Lord and against Moses: “*Let us not put Christ to a test, as some of them did! They were destroyed by snakes,*” (v.9), recalling their being bitten by snakes while they were on the mountain.

The Lord brought hardships on His Old Testament people, and, in this, the New Testament Church, the Lord has, in His foreknowledge, allowed calamities to happen to us. This by no means is to be inferred that the trials in our lives are part of God’s will. It is never God’s will that we suffer. But He uses our sufferings to bring about good, namely, that we repent of our sins and return to the Lord our God. He desires that we repent and live, not that we suffer here and into eternity.

Nevertheless, there is suffering, turmoil, and strife all around the world and right where we live. We feebly struggle amid our trials and temptations. Sometimes we want to throw our hands into the air and ask, “*Why me, Lord?*” We have asked repeatedly why bad things happen to good people, because we think of ourselves as being good people. We do not think we deserve the bad things that come our way. Saint Paul cautions us, saying, “*Therefore the one who thinks that he is standing firm should beware that he does not fall.*”¹³ *No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to all human beings,*” (vv. 12-13a).

We think we are upright when we really are flat on our backs. We consider ourselves as standing when we have really fallen into temptation. This means that we have fallen into sin. To fall into temptation means that we have fallen prey to the seduction of the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh. The sin is not in our being tempted, for even the Lord Himself was tempted. No, the sin is in our giving in to temptation, in our doing what the Lord forbids as per the Ten Commandments. As a consequence, our lives are filled with suffering, pain, and death. The Lord does not will that we suffer, but in His divinely infinite wisdom He has allowed us to hurt and to grieve as the consequences of our sins. We are no better than those whom the Lord afflicted in the Old Testament. We are no better than the Galileans whom Pontius Pilate slaughtered in the temple and no better than those who perished when the tower of Siloam fell. God allows pain, suffering, tragedy, sickness, and death to befall us so that we would repent of our sins, so that we would forever turn away from our sins and turn toward God, for if we do not repent, we will also perish.

God does not will that we suffer or perish but that we by the Holy Spirit repent and turn to Him, for it is God’s will to save sinners. He has promised to save all who come to Him in repentance and faith. As the Psalmist writes, “*Surely His salvation is near those who fear Him, in order that glory may dwell in our land,*” (Ps. 85:9). This glory is the glory of Him who comes to us in His Word, feeding us on His spiritual food, for we do not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God. He feeds us words of repentance, and words of forgiveness, for He forgives us for the sake of His Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, our spiritual Rock.

Christ is our Rock, our Fortress, and our Might. He alone is able to withstand temptation in all its forms. He alone has withstood the old evil foe. He alone has defeated him and his henchmen of sin and death. Christ repelled Satan’s temptations with the Word of God and defeated him on the cross by uttering the one word that fells him and feeds us salvation: “*It is finished!*” Jesus Christ has gone to the cross for you to pay for all of your sins. He died there so that you would have the forgiveness of sins that He won there for you. He has poured out His blood as a drink offering for you, that you would drink of it and be united with Him in His death. Even as we are united with Him in His death, we are also united with Him in His resurrection, for we are baptised into Christ. Just as the Israelites passed through the Red Sea and were baptised into Moses as they passed from slavery to freedom, so also we are baptised into Christ, through whom we have passed from slavery to sin to freedom in Christ - from death to sin, to life in Christ.

Since we belong to Christ through baptism and faith, we need not fear when we are being tempted because for us fights the valiant One, whom God Himself elected. Will we still be tempted? Of course, we will. Will we face temptation alone? Of course, we won't! *"God tempts no one. We pray... that God would guard and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our sinful nature may not deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice. Although we are attacked by these things, we pray that we may finally overcome them and win the victory,"* (Sixth Petition). Our Lord is with us, for God is faithful. *He will not allow you to be tested beyond what you can bear. Rather, when you are tested, He will also make the way of escape, so that you may be able to bear it,* (v. 13b). Our God gives us the way of Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, the way He gives us, His forgiveness, through His Word and Sacraments, our spiritual food and drink.