

### ***Who Calls on the Name of the Lord***

In the name of Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith; dear friends in Christ: Can you imagine doing it yourself? Spending forty days in a desert wasteland, out in the hot sun and burning sand during the long hours of daylight, the temperature quickly plummeting into the shivering cold range each sunset because the desert air is too dry to retain the heat, and not a single bite of food to eat for the whole duration ... and all the while the devil hounding you, cajoling you, speaking to you enticingly of an easier path, a better way, a simpler solution that would provide you in an instant with sweet relief and immediate gratification ... How do you think *you* would hold up? Not so well, huh?

And yet in today's Gospel, Jesus makes it look easy, doesn't he? You might be inclined to think, "Well, of course, it's easy for him. He is *God*, after all." True enough; but at the same time he *is* fully human. And during his time on earth, when he was in what we call the state of humiliation, he did not take advantage of his divine powers and prerogatives. Don't think for a moment that he didn't suffer severely throughout those forty days. And don't think that the temptations he was subjected to weren't very real.

But it is true that Jesus had certain advantages we don't have. When it comes to handling the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, Jesus was a master of the craft. Whenever the devil tried to launch a lunge aimed for the heart, Jesus easily parried it away with a simple, "It is written ...". We could learn a lot from his example. The better we are at handling the Word, the more familiar we are with it, the better we will be able to withstand the attacks of the devil. And Jesus had another big advantage. It occurs to me that the reason the devil actually appeared and spoke directly to him was that unlike with you and me, the devil couldn't suggest temptations directly into his mind. The mind of Christ being pure and holy was off limits to him. The devil could only gain access indirectly through audible speech. Nor did Jesus have a willing accomplice to the devil in an inborn sin nature like we have. There's a part of us that is more than happy to take up and act upon the devil's temptations. Indeed, our innate sin nature is constantly coming up with evil thoughts and actions to pursue all on its own without the devil's temptations.

And because this is true, getting along as a follower of Christ in this fallen world is a constant struggle for us. It's not 40 days of temptation that we face; it's an entire lifetime. It's every moment of every day that the devil is trying to seduce you, cause you to doubt, lead you astray, get you to give up your trust and hope in Jesus. There's a spiritual war going on for your soul. And you are in the thick of it. If you are not feeling it, there's a good chance that it's because you've already given up. You've surrendered in the war, you're taking the easy way out, and the devil has you exactly where he wants you.

But if, as I hope, you *are* feeling it, if you are cognizant that as we just sang, "I walk in danger all the way", then well you have cause for concern. Knowing the powerful forces arrayed against you, knowing the weakness of your own flesh, knowing your susceptibility to temptation, and knowing too what kinds of trials may lie before you in the form of attacks on your health or that of a loved one – either in mind or in body, accidents, deaths, family crises, financial failure, unemployment or the inability to work, crime, violence, fires, floods, famines, tornadoes, droughts, terrorism, wars, what have you – knowing all that, you may wonder, "How can I possibly make it? So many others have fallen away from the straight and narrow path of

discipleship that leads to life. How do I know that I will not be one of them? Sure, Jesus withstood his temptations. But I'm not Jesus. I don't think I can do this. I don't think I'm going to make it."

If you are thinking something like that, if you have such doubts, good. You should. You're right. *You're not going to make it.* The Christian faith isn't about *you* making it. It's about Jesus making it for you. I mean, the whole reason the Son of God came down from heaven, took on human flesh and blood, faced temptation and conquered it, and then gave his sinless life on the cross to face death and conquer it too was because *you can't* make it. And properly understood the truth is that if you believe that Jesus Christ is Lord and that he has done those things for you, then you have already made it.

This is what Paul is saying in today's Epistle. Your salvation isn't something way out there that you have to reach for; no, it's in the very word of the Gospel that is in your heart and that you speak with your mouth. Because if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord (that is, that he is God in flesh) and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead (after giving himself to suffer and die to pay the penalty of your sin), you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified (that is, declared innocent of all sins in the sight of God), and with the mouth one confesses and is saved – as Jesus says, "Who confesses me before men, I will confess before my Father in heaven." And as also the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame" – which means that in the judgment you will have no sins to be ashamed of. They will all be covered by Christ and the blood of his atonement. You are saved by grace through faith in Christ, not by your own ability and record of achievement in standing up to the wiles, attacks, and temptations of the devil.

Which in this life we will still have to face, so it's best we learn to face them well. For that we turn to the Psalm we read together earlier. Psalm 91 is known as the Soldier's Psalm. It's a real comfort to soldiers going into combat; but it's especially directed at soldiers of the cross such as ourselves going into daily battle against the devil and his forces that seek to destroy us. And what I want to highlight is that in this Psalm, the Lord does not promise to keep us out of trouble, out of the fight; but rather to be with us defending us in the midst of the fight. Indeed, if arrows are flying overhead by day and deadly pestilence is stalking you by night, if thousands are falling at your right and left hands, it means you're in the thickest of heaviest combat. Likewise, if you're treading on lions and stomping on snakes (both creatures that represent the devil in Scripture), it means that you are up close and personal in direct physical contact with the enemy.

But wait, we've already seen that that's a fight you are bound to lose. Yes! And that's precisely why you are never to face the enemy alone. When tempted by the devil and your own weak flesh, when Satan is hurling all the afflictions of Job at you, when the whole world is crashing down on you and crushing you with sorrow, you acknowledge your inability to bear it, and *you call on the name of the Lord.* You cry out to *him* for help. You affirm your absolute dependency on him. You rely on him to rescue and deliver you – and he will.

This was Israel's problem when they faced hardship and temptation in the desert. You remember how their story goes. The Lord delivers them from Egypt with great signs and wonders. He gets them safely through the Red Sea and then drowns the pursuing Egyptian army. All Israel does this happy dance on the far shore singing about what an awesome, mighty, and gracious God they have. And then what happens? The Lord puts them through a series of tests. First they run out of water. Then they run out of food. Next they are attacked by desert tribes. They face one trial after another. And every time the same thing happens. They

give up. They throw in the towel. They stop trusting the Lord. Instead they whine about how the Lord hates them, how he brought them out into the desert to kill them all. They say that they were better off in Egypt where they had it so good, where life was so much happier.

But note what they did not do. The first test: the water supply is getting low, we're almost out. "Hey, excuse us, Lord, you've been real good to us and we really appreciate all you've done; but at the moment we're getting kind of dry. How about you give us some water?" "Oh, it's water you need? Sure, coming right up. I'm so glad you asked." Look, in the end he gave them the water anyway; but can you imagine how much easier the whole exodus experience would have been had they at each trial simply called on the Lord for help?

And so it is in our lives – in our time in the desert of this world. The trials and temptations will surely come. On our own we cannot possibly hope to overcome them. But whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Therefore in every time of trouble, let's call on him in Jesus' name. Amen.

***Soli Deo Gloria!***