

First Sunday in Lent—Year C

Luke 4:1-13

March 6, 2022

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Rummaging through rubbish, also known as dumpster diving; stealing bank or credit cards; hacking computer networks, systems and databases; using breaches in computer browser security or malware; discreetly watching or listening to others as they fill out forms or enter PINs at ATMs, known as shoulder surfing. These are just a few of the many techniques used to steal someone's identity. Coined in 1964, the term "identity theft" is defined as the occurrence of someone using another person's personal identifying information – like their name, social security or driver's license #s, credit card or bank numbers – without their permission, to commit fraud or other crimes. According to one study done in 2018, nearly 60 million Americans have had their identities wrongfully acquired. Consequently, companies such as McAfee, Norton Lifelock, and Experian have created a niche in offering identity theft protection.

In today's gospel we hear three failed attempts by the master of identity theft, the devil. At work since offering the apple to Eve in the Garden of Eden, the devil's victim in today's story is none other than Jesus, the Son of God! Jesus, as our text says, is full of the Holy Spirit, as he has just emerged from his baptismal waters in the Jordan River and after having done so, hears his Father declare, *"You are my Son, the Beloved: with you I am well pleased."* It is this same Spirit that then leads him into the wilderness to teach him what this means.

Notice how each of the temptations seeks to erode and undercut Jesus' confidence in his relationship with God and therefore undermine Jesus' identity. Jesus picks up on this. Which is why when the devil offers him bread, he responds with an affirmation of trust in God. The next temptation is more transparent, offering Jesus the power of the world's leaders in return for Jesus' allegiance and worship. But again, Jesus knows that his allegiance can only be given to the one from whom he has received his identity. Finally, the devil proposes that God is not trustworthy, and goads Jesus into testing that relationship. But Jesus refuses.

In each case, the devil seeks to undermine Jesus' confidence in both God and himself. He seeks to erode Jesus' confidence that he is enough, that he is secure, that he is worthy of God's love. And in the face of these temptations, Jesus quotes the sacred story of Israel in order to assert that he is a part of that story and therefore reaffirm his

identity as a child of God. Rooted in the Scriptures, Jesus is reminded not only that he has enough and is enough but that he is of infinite worth in the eyes of God.

It is bread, power, and safety for Jesus. What is the devil using to tempt you, to draw you away from your relationship with God and the identity that you receive in and through that relationship? Could it be youth, beauty, and wealth, or confidence, fame, and security? You and I experience specific temptations very concretely, but they are all really the same. Temptations seek to shift our allegiance, trust, and confidence away from God and toward some meager substitute that promises a more secure identity.

Not one of us is spared temptation; it is a reality of our human experience. But, we have Jesus' example of strength in his self-awareness as God's own to give us hope in the midst of it. When Martin Luther became depressed, he saw it as a temptation. He would turn to his ancient foe and cry out, "I am baptized. I am baptized!" He needed the assurance of his identity, that he belonged to Christ. If he were going to carry out the great work God had given him to do he needed to be sure that even though his faith might waver, God's all-encompassing love for him would not. He needed the assurance that he was held, held firmly in the mighty grip of God's mercy.

Like Jesus, God has laid claim to us in the waters of our baptism, declaring that we, too, are God's beloved children, forever. God doesn't pass or fail us on how we handle temptations, but loves us unconditionally, enough to send God's only Son into the world to take on our lot and life, to suffer the temptations and wants, to be rejected as we often feel rejected and to die as we will die, all so that we may know God is with us, and for us, forever. Moreover, God raised Jesus from the dead in order to demonstrate that God's love is more powerful than all the hate in the world and that the life God offers is more powerful even than death.

As we travel through this Lenten season, God directs our eyes and hearts to the cross. We cannot get to Easter Sunday without Good Friday. It is on the cross, an instrument of torture, on Calvary that we grasp the depth of God's empowering love and grace poured out for us and for us to share with others. We receive this love and grace in baptism.

I want you to try something. It may be something new, or you may have done this already. Take your thumb and make the sign of the cross on your forehead as you say to yourself, "I am God's beloved child." God has filled your heart with Christ's Spirit and has promised to reside there forever, with the message that you are God's beloved child, holy and precious in God's sight. Unlike LifeLock or McAfee, the Holy Spirit's identity theft protection will never expire, for God claims us as his own, and always will. This is the good news! Amen.