

29 February 2004
Lent 1

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Our Mighty Fortress”

Text: Luke 4:1-13

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

The devil made me do it.

Were that it was so! Then I would have an excuse!

My no good neighbor made me do it. My children made me do it. My wife made me do it. The internet made me do it. My boss made me do it. My friend made me do it. My brother or sister made me do it.

It's everyone's fault but mine.

It's not my responsibility.

Do I feel better about myself now? Do you?

The devil made me do it.

Wasn't that Eve's excuse?

But it's not true. The devil, in fact, did not make me do it.

You either.

My sin is my responsibility.

I make myself do it. I know that. I just don't want to admit it.

The devil doesn't have me on strings, like a puppet.

I followed him. Instead of God.

Sometimes because I want to. Sometimes even though I know better. Sometimes because I enjoy it. Greed feels good. Gossiping is enjoyable. I like coming out on top. I'm in charge. I should be able to go after what I want. Everyone else does. Why not?

Well, there are ten reasons why not. Ten Commandments.

These I have not kept.

We must take responsibility.

At the divine seat of justice on the last day, “*the devil made me do it*” is not an acceptable plea.

Guilty or not guilty? Just answer the question please.

We are guilty. I did it. You did it.

The Holy Gospel for today is about temptation.

But it is no comfort to me! That is, if I see Jesus there as an *example*. As an example of how to overcome temptation with the Word of God and single-hearted devotion to God and His ways.

That's no comfort.

Because I *know* I should do as He does. I know!

Sometimes I do.

Mostly I don't.

What about you?

We are guilty.

But is that what this reading was for today? To give us an example? To buck us up? To encourage us to try harder next time?

Or . . . is this more like a news report from the battlefield?

From the front lines?

Yes! Jesus is not showing us *how* to fight – He is fighting for us!

One on one.

A new Adam, the same old enemy.

He enters the battlefield on our behalf.

He has just been baptized. He has just begun His public ministry. The first thing He does is confront the enemy!

And look!

The devil *cannot* make Him do it!

Oh, he tries!

We are told of three temptations, but surely there were more. As we were told, Jesus was in the wilderness forty days being tempted – not just a few times. And we are told He faced *every* temptation.

The devil was relentless.

Perhaps it is the “top three” we are given in detail. But what a three!

Food and power and glory and greed!

Isn't that what all of us want?

But where we are weak, He is strong.

His joy is in the will of His Father – not in earthly pleasures.

The devil cannot make Him do it.

Oh, he tries!

He lies – the kingdoms were not his to give!

He deceives – twisting the Word of God he quotes and taking it out of context.

He tries to cause doubt – **if** you really are the Son of God . . . It can't possibly be true!

God wouldn't treat His Son like this.
Would He?
Real temptations, every one.
How strong, we probably cannot even imagine.
We are so easy to tempt!
But not this One!
The devil cannot make Him do it.

It is as we sang: "But for us fights the Valiant One, whom God Himself elected." (LW #298 v
2)

He fights with the Word of God.
He is the Word of God.
And He is victorious!
But not only here. In the wilderness.
But also on the cross.
He wrestled with our sin there. He bore it.
He spoke the Word of God also from the cross.
The Psalms. It was His strength. His weapon. His Mighty Fortress!

Satan was there too.
The taunts at the cross sound so familiar! This was the opportune time!
If you are the Son of God . . .
Jump down!
Save yourself.
But the devil still could not make Him do it.
He stayed. For you and me.
It is as we sang: "But for us fights the Valiant One, whom God Himself elected."
In the wilderness, and on the cross.

And He won!
It didn't look like it, when He died.
But three days later, it was clear.
The tomb was empty.
Satan opened up his sack and found that it was empty!
His prey was gone!

But us, you and me, he catches, doesn't he?
We can't resist!
We listen. We follow.
But he does not have us! No!

Much to Satan's dismay, just when he thinks he has us, he opens up his sack and finds it empty!

How can this be?

We lost the fight, didn't we?

We're guilty, aren't we?

Aren't we?

Unless I won too.

Unless I was there.

In the wilderness. With Him.

On the cross. With Him.

Yes, for I am baptized. Yes, baptized into Christ.

I live in Him . . . and He also lives in me.

Take eat, this is My body. Take and drink, this is My blood.

Yes, I in Him and He in me.

And so His victory is my victory.

Over sin and Satan and death and grave.

He did it for me. In my place. To take my place. To do all I cannot do. To do it right.

His birth, His circumcision, His life.

His temptation, His obedience, His faith.

His suffering, His death, His burial, His resurrection, His ascension.

It's all mine! Credited to me. All that's His He gives to me.

What belongs to the head belongs to the body.

And we are the body of Christ.

I'm not guilty!

I'm forgiven.

It's true.

Maybe that's why Satan always tempts me to doubt it.

If you are a son, a daughter, of God . . .

You wouldn't be acting that way.

He wouldn't treat you that way!

You'd have a better life.

Follow me, Satan says. I know a better way.

Follow me, Satan says. I know an easier way.

Follow me . . .

What a lie!

On my own, I'm no match.

On my own, I'll lose every time.

But I'm not on my own.
Come to Me, Jesus said.
So I repent and return.
And I hear, "I forgive you all your sins."
The sack is empty.
I am not Satan's.
I am my Father's.

That's what Jesus taught us to say: "Our Father."
But how can this be?
Unless we live in Him.
And then His Father is our Father.
His life is our life.
His victory is our victory.
His kingdom is our kingdom.

His Kingdom . . .
Jesus also taught us to pray, "Thy kingdom come."
And it does come to us, as He comes to us.
In Word, in water, in bread and wine.
Through these we receive His Spirit.
What do we need that we do not have?
Jesus has given us Himself.
He has given us His Father.
He has given us His Spirit.
The Holy Trinity.
What else could we possibly need?

But still we are tempted.
"I walk in danger all the way." (LW #391)
The devil does not give up easy, and I am weak.
So Father, we pray, "lead us not into temptation."
What do we mean when we pray this?
Father, don't leave me on my own.
Send your Spirit to guard me and keep me.
Your Spirit, to lead me to Christ and to keep me in Christ. Where I am safe.
On my own, I lose. I will lose every time.
But in Christ, I overcome and obtain the victory.
In Him, I live.
In Him, I am forgiven. Satan's sack is empty.

In Him.

In the flesh and blood of Christ.

Our Saviour.

Our Mighty Fortress.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.