

Finley James F.
- All things in ...

ADP 0937

790369



THE
CATHOLIC
HOUR

*"All Things In
Proportion"*

Rev. James F. Finley, C.S.P.

MARCH 15, 1959

Deacidified

In the first two words that Christ speaks to us, He sets up a Divine plan and determines for us a cooperative part in the completing of that plan. Such definiteness on the part of God encourages us to look for specific means whereby we can fulfill the burden that falls on us in these first two lessons. We are sure that Christ has not given us this grave responsibility of collaborating in the work of salvation and then failed to leave us the means or techniques for carrying it out. But — confronted, as we are, by the jigsawed and puzzling pieces of life, what can we do to begin fashioning a pattern that pleases Christ and His heavenly Father?

Our third scene and Christ's third word form the basis for a third lesson. After Christ had been baptized by St. John and revealed as the Son of God, He hurried out of the city and hid Himself in the desert. For forty days and forty nights, like a presage of our own Lent, He fasted and prayed. At the end of His



vigils, the evangelist tells us that Jesus was hungry and the devil appeared to Him.

In the story that follows this moment, there are actually three scenes described and in each scene, Christ speaks a word. But, since all the scenes and the words flow out of the devil's effort to tempt Christ, it is permissible for us to group the triple temptations and Christ's responses as one lesson.

Christ, hungry and weary, suffering His humanity to feel the weakness that could come from an ordeal of prolonged fasting and praying, faces the devil. That Satan appeared at all before Christ is effrontery supreme but he deepens the insult of his presence to an incalculable degree by testing Christ to vanity.

"If Thou art the Son of God," he says, "command that these stones become bread."

Christ's answer is a sharp rebuke: "It is written, 'not by bread alone does man live, but in every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'."

Satan is not daunted. He tries again as St. Matthew tells us: "Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, 'If Thou art the Son of God cast

Thyself down, for it is written, 'He has given His angels charge over Thee and they shall bear Thee up lest Thou dash Thy foot against a stone'."

Though Our Lord is again put to the need of reminding the devil that 'it is written — thou shalt not tempt the Lord, Thy God,' Satan will have one more trial of Christ.

This time, he brings Jesus to the summit of a high mountain and there he points out below all the riches and the treasures and power of the world. "All these I shall give Thee," promises Satan, "if falling down, Thou wilt adore me!"

This is more than the summit of a mere mountain now as the devil speaks...now he is speaking from the highest point in the universe...the topmost point of diabolic pride...God is to adore him!

Christ can abide this evil presence no longer. In just rage He answers the challenge of Satan, telling him, "Begone, Satan, for it is written, 'the Lord thy God shalt thou adore and Him alone shalt thou serve'."

How ageless, how almost timeless is this scene! Go back through all the moments of recorded history up to the time and presence of Christ and you find the devil making his promises, offering

his satisfactions if...if...if... only someone will fall down and adore him. Go back even into the moments of the world's creation...with Adam and Eve... go back beyond this, to the creation of the orders of angels and this contest over following God or adoring Satan can be found.

It is safe to say that if we go forward from Christ this contest will again be found as the stand-out struggle that marks the march of all men through history. We don't need to analyze history to discover this. Christ warned us to be watchful because this battle with Satan was to be part of our proving of ourselves as His followers. Our warfare was to be against the world, the flesh and the devil. And again through His first Pope, Peter, Christ announces that the devil goes about all the day seeking whom he may devour.

The New Testament is replete with warnings against the struggle we shall face with the powers of hell but for now we need go no further than this scene we have taken for our third lesson. Christ did not go through the fasting and praying in the desert and follow this with three temptations from the devil just to demonstrate how vigorous he was spiri-

tually and physically. What we see and what we hear in this gospel story is for our exemplifying. This is a story we are to study, these are words we are to ponder and fix in our minds and hearts as principles of all our Christian action.

I think we might well study and develop principles out of this story of Christ in the desert because the scene, the words, the conflict are almost a summary or synopsis of what we face as we purpose to cooperate in the plan of salvation. In our efforts to show forth the Son of God to the world, we will become fatigued and be overtaken by weakness and in that weakness will come temptations. The temptations will assault us when we are hungry...not just for bread...but suffering the normal human hungers for possessions, for sex and companionship, for power, for wealth, for fulfillment of the desires in our hearts.

For all these occasions, Christ would leave us a rule, a way by which we may judge rightly in our choices. The hunger, no matter how seemingly good and justifiable, is not to be served because it is a hunger. It is to be served or denied as indicated by the word of God. We are to remember that we live...com-

pletely and integrally...not by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God the Father.

The values of life and its living are not as we think them to be needed, not as our humanness longs after them...not as our hundred hungers cry out for them; rather, the values of life are as the word of God disposes them for us. In this way do we live...in ordered choices and in sensitivity to Divine values.

Christ's rejections of the three suggestions of the devil indicate the range of values that will present a struggle to us for our lives. His rejections indicate also where the balance must be tipped and what must weigh most importantly as we make our judgments. We live not by bread alone...not in a loss of balance that would foster the material at the expense of the spiritual...we live in an entirety of values that includes spiritual and material things. Our lesson in this word of Christ is that if there is to be any stress at all, it is to be on the word of God. If there is to be any occasion where the material and the spiritual are in conflict, the choice that must be made is for that side which best serves the cause of God. If there is any con-

flict between satisfying self or glorifying God, we live by giving God honor and submission, not by indulging self in its satisfaction.

History shows that on many occasions and among many men, this lesson has been tragically forgotten or put aside. Even in our day, God appears to have lost ground and the devil to have gained it in this contest over values. In a strange way, man seems to have his sense of values more confused than ever before, despite Christ's example in the desert. . .and despite men's past mistakes.

Once upon a time, when a man sinned, he knew his sin and himself a sinner. He may have fled the consequence of the law, but not the conviction of his conscience. Today, too many men refuse to accept not only the fact that they have committed a sin but that there is any such thing as sin. Where once they might have struck their breast and said, "Through my fault!" today they look up and ask, "What fault?"

Christ has posed these original temptations for us to indicate that we must know the truth of things and the true value of them. Knowing this truth that we must first seek the kingdom of heaven

and then all other things would be added to us, we would not get lost in, or bound, or fettered by material possessions. Knowing this balance, we would be more able to keep the drive of our satisfaction and hunger in order and arrange them as God demanded. We were to know this great truth and knowing it, to be free of all things that we might more readily pursue God.

But today, the expression about knowing the truth and the truth making us free, has become, in some circles, you shall know the lie and the lie shall make you free. Values have become so lopsided that the lie...the magnificent lie which tells us that we are to be satisfied at all costs to God or to our neighbor...this has become what we live by rather than the word of God. And this magnificent lie...this pinnacle of pride like satan's own...rises to cast its evil shadow into our world of love and marriage, of politics and sociology, of business and finance, of philosophy and education.

In some quarters of our generation we are developing a world that can not recognize evil any longer because it can not recognize truth any more. Around us develops a world without a sense of

values...and in the light of the crimes committed, we can say, it is without sense and without values.

These people would blot out the story of Christ being tempted in the desert because that story cues us to responsibility for our acts. But these theorists teach that no one is responsible any more. Their philosophy is quicker than the eye...by the magic of their propositions you do no wrong no matter how evil you are. Sure, maybe a deed was done that some call a sin or a crime, but you didn't do it. Maybe a reflex of you did it...maybe an obsession or compulsion...and I-can't-remember-kind-of-you...and out-of-my-mind-for-a-minute-you...but not the real you. No, never you, because you can't do wrong...you see, there was no you to do wrong or there was no wrong to do.

The deception is clever; well, it is clever enough to make such theories and philosophies acceptable by more than a few Christians. I could run off a list of actions that you see accepted in our society today and every one of these actions would splinter and fragment the Ten Commandments, the word of God. The action, I repeat, are acceptable, most acceptable. In fact, many men and

women live by and for this new code and not by the word of God found in the commandments.

Where does our society rebuke these people as Christ rebuked satan? Rebuke them? Why in some cases their very adherence to the new code makes these people popular and famous. Some of them are our acknowledged leaders in a variety of chosen professions. Some of them run our organizations, form our fashions, contribute to our habits and manners, write our books and songs and educate our children.

I suppose a better and more practical question to ask is: How can our society rebuke them?

The most practical answer I can give to that question is that each one of us individually rebukes them in our own Christ-like life.

We must learn our lessons from the lips of Christ and learn them firmly and well. If we are to cooperate in the plan of salvation, we must learn balance and order in our wants and desires. The little conflicts where we want our own way must be occasions where we permit ourselves to be vanquished for the sake of Christ and after the example of Christ. He would not give one small

genuflection to serve satan, but He willingly gave His whole body on the cross to save mankind.

Out of today's scene, that I have described we can grasp the importance of fasting and praying, of watching lest we fall into temptations. We can live fixed in God's words and God's sense of values, so that when the devil tries us, our response is a rebuke to him, a quick sharp recognition of his offers as evil and a quicker, sharper rejection of his beguilements.

Our rebuke to all the false theories and theorists will best be made in living our lives as God points out its important aspects. Bread is important and so is love or sex or money or renown. But none of these is more important than God. We must live our needs and suffer our needs and die with them unfulfilled if to have them satisfied meant falling down and worshipping the devil.

We must live according to heaven's proportions...as Christ's third word tells us..."not by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God, the Father."

ADDITIONAL COPIES
ARE AVAILABLE FOR \$.10 EACH.

BULK LOTS MAY ALSO BE
HAD AT THE FOLLOWING RATES:

10 TO 99 COPIES.....	\$.05 @
100 COPIES AND OVER.....	.04 @

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CATHOLIC MEN

1312 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D. C.

Presented by

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CATHOLIC MEN