

Whether in a garden, or in a wilderness, the devil is very much at home. In a garden, he tempted our first parents to eat, and they did, falling into sin. In the wilderness, he tempted the Children of Israel to grumble against God, demanding to eat. Now back in the wilderness, he tempts the Son of God to eat. And when he fails in this temptation, he will wait until Jesus is in a garden, the one we know as Gethsemane.

Be warned, therefore. Whether your life is a garden, or whether it more resembles a wilderness, the devil is at home with you and me. He knows his craft. He is the master of temptation. And he is not hesitant to apply his craft against any one of us. If he is so bold as to tempt the Son of God Himself, will he be any less bold with us?

We have entered into Lent. The forty days before us remind us of Jesus' forty days in the wilderness. It was a time of testing for Jesus, being tempted by the devil. These forty days for us, as with our entire life, are a time of testing. The devil doesn't care that you are God's children through Holy Baptism. He tempted the Israelites after they were baptized in the Red Sea. He tempts Jesus after He is baptized in the Jordan River. He tempts you also, because you are baptized children of God.

The text before us, therefore, is a sobering one, a warning. But it is also one of great comfort for us. The devil never met a man who was his match. Until Jesus. He does not succumb to the devil's temptations. He defeats the devil. And here is the comfort for us. Jesus defeats Satan because we cannot. He defeats the devil, not as our example, but as our Savior. Jesus is your representative out there in the wilderness. He is your substitute, your champion. And even though the devil is after you with all his might because you are God's baptized child, it is within your baptism that you are given the defensive weapons you need to resist the devil and gain the victory. Let me show you.

*"If you are the Son of God,"* says the devil to Jesus. The devil knows who Jesus is. That's why he tempts Him. At Jesus' baptism, the Father declared: *"You are My beloved Son."* There is no guesswork here. Jesus knows who He is.

*"If you are the Son of God."* And he really means: "Since you are the Son of God, *command this stone to become bread.*" "You're hungry. You're weak. You need to eat. You have to eat sometime. Why not now? If, as you think, you are the Son of God, well then, use your power to turn this stone into bread for yourself."

It sounds logical. But remember why Jesus is out there in the wilderness. He is the nation of Israel reduced to one. They were the disobedient sons of God. He is the obedient Son. Where they failed, He succeeds. They angrily demanded to eat in disobedience to God. Jesus, in obedience to His Father, therefore, will not eat.

It was held, back in those days, that a son was a son only if he was obedient to his father. What does this say about the Children of Israel? Were they really children of God? Their disobedience in the wilderness says otherwise.

But doesn't our disobedience suggest the same thing? "If you are a child of God," says the devil. And these words he puts to you and to me. "If you are God's child, as you think you are, then why are you disobedient to Him? No son or daughter of God would act the way you do. Maybe you were God's child at one time, back when you were baptized, but you know, as well as I," says the devil, "and as well as God knows, how utterly disobedient you have been since then. He is not your loving God anymore because, by your disobedience, you have proved that you are not His child."

He's vicious. His words can sting. And they can make sense to us. "Maybe God has disowned me. Others are not aware of all the really horrible sins I have done. But I sure am aware of them, and so is God. Maybe He is done being my dear Heavenly Father. Maybe I'm out in this wilderness of life all by myself, without God on my side."

Do not think it strange if thoughts like these have ever come to you. This is what falling into temptation can do. It's what guilt can do.

Jesus confronted the devil with Scripture in all of his temptations. We must do the same. Recall with me the parable Jesus told of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15. He left his father, disowning him, living a train wreck of a life of disobedience. Coming to his senses, he returned to his father. Yet he came back thinking of himself not as a son anymore, but as a slave. You know the parable. The father still loved him as a son. He rejoiced to have his son back. This boy, as disobedient as he was, was always his father's son, and he was always the boy's father.

Jesus told this parable to point you to what your baptism tells you day after day – that you are God's beloved child, His precious son and daughter. And even more, that you are His forgiven son and daughter because He is your forgiving Father. And the devil cannot do a thing about that. You are who you are, not because of how you live, but because Jesus lived, suffered and died on a cross, and rose again for you.

This is how Jesus' defeat of the devil in the wilderness is so comforting. Jesus silenced the devil with Scripture. The same Scripture that comforts you. The same Scripture that declares to you in your baptism the same thing God said to Jesus: "*You are My beloved Son.*" These words are also for you.

So, here it is, your baptism is proof of who you are, that God has not disowned you, that you are His beloved son and daughter. And because this is who you are, this is how you want to live, and should live. Not as one who does what the devil tempts you to do. But as a royal son and daughter of your loving God who desires to do as He wants you to do.

Yet, you are weak, my friend, as am I. When you fall, therefore, and give in to temptation, do not despair. Remember your baptism. It reminds you that you are God's child. And it proclaims to you that your sin is forgiven. Amen.