

“Live out your identity!” Mt 4:1-11

“Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ And the tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.' ⁴ But he answered, 'It is written, '"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" ⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple ⁶ and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, '"He will command his angels concerning you,' and '"On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'" ⁷ Jesus said to him, 'Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" ⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ⁹ And he said to him, 'All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.'" ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to him, 'Be gone, Satan! For it is written, '"You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'" ¹¹ Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.”

Today for our meditation we have this well-known narrative of Jesus temptation. This is such a famous event in Jesus life. Such an inspiring event. In the very beginning of His ministry.

Right after Jesus was baptized, right after the Holy Spirit descended on Him, right after the Father had said that ‘this is my beloved Son’, the Spirit led Him to be tempted. The tempter came to Jesus and actually acknowledged that Jesus is the Son of God.

But then he tempted Jesus to use His divine power, His gifts for Himself. Do it for yourself, feed yourself, turn stones into bread, if you are the Son of God. Jesus replied with - ‘man shall not live from bread alone, but from every word, that comes from the mouth of God’. He endured the first temptation. One : nil.

Then the devil tempted Jesus to test God, by quoting Scriptures. ‘If you really are the Son of God, then... then... He will protect you whatever foolishness you do’. Let’s test Him, let’s see if He really cares for you! To what Jesus simply reply that ‘you shall not put the Lord your God to the test’. He won again, two : nil.

Then Satan said to Jesus that if only He would felt down and worshiped him, Satan would give him all the kingdoms of this world and their glory. Jesus again replied that 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve’. Three : nil. And the winner is?! Yes, Jesus. Then the devil left Him.

Interesting event. Very. Today we'll try to understand what message Matthew is giving us by telling this account, and what are implication for our live. What is Matthew's message, and what are implication for our lives.

It is inspiring account for us Christians, indeed. Isn't it? So often it is used to illustrate how we can stand against the devil and his temptations, learning from the example of Jesus. By quoting the Scriptures, by remaining faithful.

We may look at Jesus example with admiration, we may even desire to be like Him, to be heroes of faith, defeating all temptations by the word of God, defeating the devil and making him leave us. We may, indeed, dream about it...

Essentially, there is nothing wrong with it, we can and should learn from Jesus, especially when it comes to dealing with temptations and drawing strengths from the word of God. That is our true source of wisdom, protection and peace.

But! if we think that Matthew's main intention writing about Jesus temptations is to give us instructions, we are so wrong. So wrong. These words are not written to give us instructions. By describing Jesus temptations Matthew is not setting us guidelines for a holy life. Follow these, and you'll be OK. Not at all.

If we think that we could follow Jesus example, then let us first ask ourselves, - why did then Jesus come here? Why did He come to us as one of us, as a man. Why did He go to Jerusalem, suffered, was crucified and rouse again? To serve us as an example? Example for what? To give us guidelines for a holy life?

Think about our first parent, as we read today, they were living in this wonderful garden, created for them, from time to time enjoying the very presence of holy God the Creator. What happened with them? They also were tempted... and even they failed. Satan was stronger and smarter than they.

How can we ever think about defeating the devil on our own? Looking at Jesus example? Just think, how many times per day we are tempted and fail? Think about what commandments reveal us.

Do we expect to receive all good things - meaning for our lives, our identity, security, true joy and wisdom - only from God the Father, or we trust that other things in this world can actually give us more? How often do we confess that we trust true God, and how often we are ashamed to admit that we are Christians?

How often do we give God thanks for everything He does for us all the time, for life, health, food, families and friends, community, peace, protection, for the Church. How often do we neglect His word and are not interested in it at all?

How often do we read the Bible and meditate upon God's word? "Blessed is the man who ... delights in the word of the LORD, and on his word meditates day and night." (Ps 1:1-2) Is it about us?

How often we are angry, jealous, envious, lustful, greedy and so on. We do all of this all the time. How can we ever dream about overcoming temptations on our own! It doesn't matter, what instructions and what examples are given to us.

If Jesus temptations are about to instruct us in any way, then it is - to remind how helpless we are in our temptation. The Son of God didn't come to instruct you how to save yourself from attacks of the devil and sin. "Just do what I did, and you'll overcome the evil one." M-m.

It's not why Jesus came. Yes, we are His disciples, and He is our teacher. But first and foremost, we are sinners, and He is our Savior. He knew that we are helpless and hopeless in this battle against the devil. He came for you, because you can't save yourself from sin and the devil. It doesn't matter what kind of examples you have before you. Jesus knew it. That's why He had to come.

But if this is not about instructions, what then is Matthew telling us? It is something much, much better. It is proclamation of victory, of our victory, of your victory. You don't have to defeat sin and the devil. Why?

For Jesus already has done it for you. By His holy life, by His faithfulness in temptations, by His refusal to test God, by His perfect trust and obedience to God the Father alone, by His sacrificial care for others. He lived a life in a way which we all are supposed to live.

He did it perfectly, and He did it on behalf of you. He took our sins upon Himself. Your sins. He died your death, death that you deserve. And He rouse again, for death didn't have any power over Him. He as the first among many.

He did it all of this for you. You don't have to do it anymore. It's done. Victory is yours. Satan is defeated. That's Matthew's message retelling us Jesus temptations.

Not to instruct you for a battle, but to announce your victory. To assure that Jesus has already done it all. To you it's given as a gift. Just trust and receive this precious gift. Have faith and that's yours.

But then we need to ask – what are implications of this victory for our life? What does it mean for me? Does it mean that there will be no temptations? Or maybe it means that I don't have to resist temptation once Jesus have already done it on behalf of me? None of these.

When each of you were baptized, you were made a child of God. That's your new the most important identity. Once you have this identity, you are supposed to live accordingly. Now, let's look back to Jesus temptations once more.

What was He tempted to do? What was Satan actually trying to achieve? He admitted that Jesus was the Son of God, but then he tried to persuade Jesus to act against His identity. First, he tempted Jesus to use His divine power for His own benefit, instead of using it in the service to all people.

Then he challenged Jesus to test the Father's faithfulness, instead of trusting Him completely and wholeheartedly. Finally He tried to bribe Him to put His trust, His obedience to something else, instead of true God. In all these temptations and throughout His life Jesus remained faithful to His identity, He acted as the true Son of God.

You are sons and daughters of the same God. You were made God's children in your baptism. As Satan attacked Jesus identity, the same way he will do whatever he can to attack your identity as God's child. To prevent you from living out your new identity.

Our temptations may not exactly correspond to Jesus temptation, but they will be attempts to attack our identity as children of God. This is where we need to put our prayers and efforts, thinking, how can I live out my new identity as God's son or daughter.

How can I use all my gifts, all that I have, all that I am, for the sake of others? How can I live not for myself, but for all the people in my life. How can I serve them better, instead of using them for my own benefit. How can I be better child, sibling, spouse, parent, citizen, employee, member of congregation, etc.

It is difficult, you know it and I know it. First, it is so difficult because culture around us everywhere, from early childhood tells that this is all about you. All about you. Besides, many of our most important relationships are tainted by sin, broken and ugly. It is difficult.

How can I accept God's will in my life without questioning it, without testing God, without requiring Him to do what I want, but trusting and asking 'let your will happen'.

It's easy when everything is good in your life. 'Thank you, God, that my will is also your will.' But when temptations, or sufferings come, it can be so hard. The honest answer is, we can't live out our new identity on our own. And ... we don't have to do it on our own.

For we have the same Helper that Jesus had. Remember, when Jesus was baptized, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him. The Holy Spirit led Jesus to be tempted by Satan. The Holy Spirit was together with Him all the time, from His conception till His resurrection.

Before Jesus was betrayed and murdered, He said to His disciples. “And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, to be with you forever... the Spirit of truth ... You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.” (John 14:16-17)

God keeps His promises. Always. He has already given you this Helper in your baptism. As apostle Paul put it, you ‘were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it... (Eph. 1:13-14)

Besides, the Holy Spirit keeps coming to you, He dwells with you and is in you. He comes to you whenever we gather in God’s presence in the Divine Service, whenever we listen, read, and meditate upon the word of God. Whenever we partake in Jesus supper, receiving His life-giving body and blood as spiritual food.

Only thanks to Him you can have a trust to you Father in Heaven. Only thanks to Him you can strive to live out your identity as children of God. Purified, and strengthen by the Spirit. And if we succeed at least a little bit, living as children of God, that’s a testimony not of our goodness, but of the Spirit’s work in us.

This is what we can learn from Matthew’s account of Jesus temptations. Victory over Satan is won. Jesus, the Son of God did it. He did it instead and on behalf of you. Thanks to Him, each of you are a child of God.

As such we all are called to live out our new identities, but not on our own, but as a part of victorious team, by the power of the Holy Spirit, for the glory of God the Father.

Amen.