

“Jesus is not a good example” Luke 4:1-13

And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry. The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.” And Jesus answered him, “It is written, “Man shall not live by bread alone.”” And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said to him, “To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” And Jesus answered him, “It is written, “You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.”” And he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, “He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,” and “On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.”” And Jesus answered him, “It is said, You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.”” And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.

As we as congregation begin to focus on our main mission, that is, on winning souls for Christ, we have this interesting passage from the Gospel according Matthew. Description of Jesus temptations.

Christians often think about Jesus as their example. Is this a proper way how to think about Jesus? As about our example? If we think about Jesus only as about our example, then we could end up by thinking that Christianity is about doing good things; like Jesus did. Many, so many actually think this way.

That’s so tragic, that’s so sad. For them the wonderful and life giving Gospel message about God’s undeserved grace has turned into rubbish – be a nice person, like Jesus. That’s it. Why would anyone in the world bother about being nice like some Jewish guy two thousand year ago? Why for God’s sake?

Jesus didn’t come to show us what we need to do. He came to do what we can’t do. We do not love God with all our heart and mind, He did. We do not listen to the Father and do not lead our lives as He commands, He did.

Our rebellions and selfishness earn and deserve only God’s wrath and condemnation. Jesus obedience to the Father’s will and His willingness to sacrifice Himself for the sake of others earned Him Father’s favour. We fail, He succeeded.

But then, He, the beloved Son, the obedient and loving Son of God, did incomprehensible. He stepped in our place. All God’s wrath and condemnation about our disobedience and selfishness came upon Him as He was nailed to the Cross.

He, the holy and innocent Son of God received our punishment, the same one that as we confessed a few minutes ago, we justly deserve. And in exchange He gives us God's love, God's favour, He gives us forgiveness and life. Eternal life!

Do we deserve it? No! Can we ask for it? No! Do we even realize how deep the corruption of our souls is? No! Jesus knew it, He knew that we can't even assess our state; most of the time we don't feel burdened by our sin.

There was a car accident. The driver survived, and when the help arrived they asked him, how was he? He replied, that he was fine, that he didn't feel any pain. All of this because his spine was so damaged that he couldn't feel anything.

We may not feel and struggle with our sinfulness. But we will die because of it. We all. There is nothing we can do. But Jesus Christ, He comes and He offers us this wonderful exchange –

- 'I'll take your broken, damaged life, your dying body, and I'll give you a new life, and after a little while, also a new body. Beautiful, perfect, eternal. That's my gift to you. For me it cost my life, but to you - I give it for free.'

This is why Jesus came. This is how we need to think about Him. He is my Saviour. "He has redeemed me lost and condemned human being. He has purchased and freed me from all my sins, from death and the power of the devil.

Not with gold or silver, but with his holy precious blood and with his innocent sufferings and death. He has done all of this in order that I may belong to Him, live under Him in His Kingdom, and serve Him in eternal righteousness, innocence and blessedness."

This is what Jesus is about. This is the Gospel, the Good News, that I, selfish and ignorant sinner, who was arrogantly heading towards eternal death, now can live in communion with true God waiting for His Kingdom to be revealed.

Does this mean that we can't learn from Jesus example? Of course, it doesn't mean that. Once we know who Jesus Christ is, true God and my Saviour, we can learn a lot from His life and example. We can learn a lot from today's Gospel reading.

As soon as Jesus was baptized, He was sent to prepare for His mission. How did He do it? In the hardest boot-camp ever known. "And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil.

And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." And Jesus answered him, "It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone.'"

This was the first of three temptations. What was it? Essentially Satan acknowledge who Jesus was, the Son of God, but He tempted Jesus to use His gifts, His powers for Himself.

The Father had sent Jesus to prepare for His mission, to experience how hard it may be not to give in to temptations, so that Jesus could be ready for His ultimate mission, for His ultimate sacrifice.

When out of compassion He feed thousands, they wanted to make Him a king. How easy would it be, having such powers, to become a king! Later, on the Cross Jesus will be ridiculed:

“You helped others, now help yourself and we’ll believe that you are the Son of God.” How hard was it – not to live for Himself, not to use His power?! In all these situations Jesus remained faithful to the Father’s mission. We have this hope of eternal life only because of His faithfulness.

When we think about ourselves, we Christians are God’s children. This is our core identity. Jesus knew that to be the Son of God meant to live according to the Father’s will. Do we know what it means to live according to the Father’s will?

Think about the abundant gifts that God has given to us, think about God’s will, to use everything that we have and everything that we are serving our neighbours, rescuing them from the devil and bringing them to Christ.

How often are we tempted to consider God’s gifts as our own, and to use them for our own gratification? How often do we live as if our life consisted of bread alone, meaning, of material goods alone, as if there was no need for God, or time for His mission.

How much time and energy do we spend bringing others to Christ? How often do we fail the Father’s expectations, how often do we fall prey to Satan’s temptation to live for ourselves, and not for our God?

“And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said to him, “To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” And Jesus answered him, “It is written, “You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.””

This was the second temptation. Jesus was tempted to brake the 1st commandment and to trust something else more that true God. It didn’t work with Jesus. But it works so well with us. We fall for it all the time.

Satan uses this strategy again and again. He knows that we often care more about ourselves and this world than about God. And this is what He does. He promises that if only we worship him, he will give us everything, and then you will be happy

and at peace. Just worship me! Sure, he doesn't present himself as Satan. He presents himself hiding behind many good things.

But he offers us to make something else more important than God. To care for, to strive for, to love, to fear to lose something else more than true God. It can be your spouse, or it can be your child, or parent, or career, or achievements, or your good name, or possessions, or health, or any other good thing.

Think about this: how do we love God? When we keep His commandments. It is very simple, we show our love and commitment to our God, when we keep His commandments, we when seek His presence.

When we keep the Holy day holy, when we read God's Word, when we pray Him, when we call upon His name in mornings and in evening, with thanksgiving and asking for His help.

Now, examine yourself. Which things for you are more important than being in God's presence in the Divine Service, that reading and meditating upon God's word, that praying. What hinders you?

What do you do instead? What do you like to think about and to talk about more than about Christ? Ask these questions and you will see where and how Satan tempts you.

There is something remarkable in this temptation. Satan claims that he has control over everything and if only you will do this and that, he will bless you. He is a liar. He can't fulfil his promises fully, and he never does.

Your Father in heaven, on the other hand, gives you everything even before you ask. He created you, He gave life to you and still sustains it. He sent His Son as your Redeemer before you were even born. He sends to you His Spirit, so that you could know the truth and inherit the eternal life. All these are His gifts.

He gives them unconditionally. This is what kind of God He is. Prodigally generous. And only then He asks you to appreciate these gifts and to use them properly. Be mindful how Satan tempts you, and know where true blessings come from.

"And he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.''" And Jesus answered him, "It is said, You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

The last temptation was about testing God. Or we could say, about making doubt God. Satan does it as well. So often He sends thoughts which make us doubt the Word of God.

‘Can you even know what God said? It was so long time ago anyway. He probably didn’t mean His commandments too seriously. At least not for you. He didn’t mean that you need to be His witnesses. Don’t bother other and don’t waste your time, enjoy yourself!

And if pastors tell you that you need to read and study the Word of God, or to take God’s will for your lives seriously, don’t worry, they are just doing their job... but you, you know better. Just be nice like Jesus was.’

He does this and many other things. He makes us doubt God’s faithfulness when things don’t go well, when we suffer losses, when we experience injustice. ‘What kind of God would allow this to happen to you?’

Then you can answer. Aloud. ‘I know what kind of God. The one who sacrificed His own life for me, who is with me always and who will have me with Him in His Kingdom forever. His name is Jesus Christ. He is my Saviour and my Lord!’

“And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.” Jesus won. He triumphed over His tempter and our tempter. The victory is won. Satan, sin and death - they all are under Jesus feet. We are redeemed and freed to live with Jesus as our Lord, waiting for His Kingdom to be revealed.

And while we wait, we have these two things to do. First, fight our temptations. Trying to live as God’s children, trusting God above all things, having Him as the most important person in our life. For He is our God! Your heavenly Father!

There is important lesson in this last sentence. When you resist the temptation, Satan departs. Not forever, but still. And with every time when you with the help of the Holy Spirit resist Satan, you grow stronger and stronger.

Second, as we grow in our Christian maturity, God prepares and sends us in His mission. He didn’t save us for our sake only, but so that we could be His witnesses to all who are less fortunate and don’t know Jesus yet.

This is what we all, what each of you are called to do. Mature as Christians, grow in God’s wisdom and serve as His witnesses, be on His mission, tell what He has done, save people and bring them to Christ.

I guess, we’ll be busy till the end of our life. Fighting temptation, trying to mature as Christians and witnessing about Jesus Christ. And the wonderful thing is, that we can do all of this knowing that all authority is in Jesus hands and that He is with us till the end of this age.

Let’s go as God’s children and co-workers of Jesus and serve our Lord with joy.

Amen.