



MAKING PLANS TO BEAR FRUIT in the CHURCH'S PENITENTIAL SEASONS

HOLY MOTHER CHURCH has given us penitential seasons (Advent and Lent) and penitential days (Ember Days and various vigils) to aid us in reforming our fallen human nature after we enter into Her School of Saints through the Sacraments. She also wants us to practice for heaven in order to be more fully prepared to enter into the heavenly mysteries of the various feast days. In order to reap the most fruits from these seasons and days, we need to formulate a concrete plan.

One such plan is built upon the three temptations of His Majesty in the desert. Perhaps this is one reason Holy Mother Church places this Gospel at the head of the Forty Days of Lent. Keeping in mind that each of the three scenes of the temptations involve two parts, with the devil tempting and His Majesty responding, we should formulate two parts to match these scenes. Consider, then, the following:

THE FIRST TEMPTATION revolves around hunger and food with the devil tempting His Majesty to turn stones into bread. *"And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterwards He was hungry. And the tempter coming said to Him: If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. Who answered and said: It is written, Not in bread alone doth man live, but in every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God"* (Matt 4:2-4). Every penitential season ought then to involve the two elements mentioned in this Gospel passage, namely some sort of fasting and some reading or meditation on the Sacred Scriptures.

In this penitential season, I am going to (i) fast (name the foods/drinks, etc.):

and (ii) read daily from Sacred Scripture (name the book and/or chapter or perhaps passages you plan to memorize):

THE SECOND TEMPTATION is about not making a show of oneself or the need of self-effacement. *"Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, and set Him upon the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him: If thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down, for it is written: That He hath given His angels charge over thee, and in their hands shall they bear thee up, lest perhaps thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said to him: It is written again: Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God"* (Matt. 4:5-7). Again, every penitential season ought to be about humbling oneself as well as seeking to overcome any presumption we may have toward God's mercy toward us. Furthermore, instead of giving a show of oneself to others, one should give alms quietly.

In this penitential season, I am going to (i) humble myself (name ways to do this, such as making a good confession, using "I" as least as possible, foregoing commenting on websites, spend more time being patient to see what happens before supporting unsubstantiated claims, etc.):

and (ii) I am going to give some alms (name some, if possible) quietly to those in need:

THE THIRD TEMPTATION is about the proper worship owed to God. *"Again the devil took Him up into a very high mountain, and shewed Him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, And said to Him: All these will I give Thee, if falling down thou wilt adore me. Then Jesus saith to him: Begone, Satan: for it is written, The Lord thy God shalt thou adore, and Him only shalt thou serve"* (Matt. 4:8-10). Again every penitential season ought to be given over to improving our proper worship of God and rejecting of the world and all its concupiscences.

In this penitential season, I am going to (i) eliminate worldly things from my life (e.g., various vanities in your life, including what we watch, read, how we spend our time (secular images), turns of phrases in our speech, etc.):

and (ii) improve my practices of our holy religion (e.g., more frequent attendance at Holy Mass, full Rosary daily, renew consecrations, etc.) and read daily from a good book (e.g., from an approved Scripture Commentary from the Church Fathers, Doctors, Saints, and/or from the little book, *Humility of Heart*, and/or from the *Imitation of Christ*).



"Then the devil left Him; and behold angels came and ministered to Him" (Matt. 4:11). If we use our time well in fulfilling such a plan, St. Thomas says that like His Majesty, "men who conquer the devil merit the ministration of the good angels." ❧