

Lesson 3

JESUS WHO OVERCAME TEMPTATIONS



In preparation for the start of his public life Jesus fasted and prayed for forty days in the wilderness. This made him very hungry and at that opportunity the tempter approached Jesus and said: “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” The temptation was to use his divine powers for selfish purposes. Jesus used the word of God to overcome this temptation for luxury. He said: It is written; “One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” Then the tempter took him to the holy city and placed him at the pinnacle of the temple, saying 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, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.”

Here Jesus was tempted to attain fame and popularity by using his glory and power. However Jesus defeated the tempter again using another word of God. He said: “It is also written that you shall not tempt the Lord your God.”

Then the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour; and he said to Jesus, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” Jesus bravely survived this temptation to acquire worldly wealth, position and power. He commanded: “Away with you Satan! For it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'” Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him (Mt. 4: 1- 11). Jesus was tempted to misuse his divine powers for luxury, power and wealth. In our lives also such temptations are bound to face us. Following the example of Jesus we also should overcome them.

Jesus was able to defeat Satan, the tempter, because he had developed spiritual strength through abstinence, fasting and prayer. Satan who tempted even Jesus the Son of God, approaches us in various ways to tempt us. In this context, the words of St. Peter the apostle serve as a reminder for us. He says: “Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour” (1 Pet 5: 8).

Word of God Based Life

It is the Word of God that gives us power to overcome temptations. The Psalmist says: “I treasure your word in my heart so that I may not sin against you” (Ps. 119: 11). The Word of God keeps us away from the ways of sin. And it sanctifies us. This is how Jesus prayed to his Father: “Father, sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth” (Jn. 17: 17). The one who reads the word of God daily and live accordingly will never go astray. “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Ps. 119: 105). The one who reads the word of God, meditates on it and lives accordingly is like the wise person who constructed his house on a rock. A life with strong foundations on the word of God strengthens us to advance without faltering, in the face of all adversities.

Fasting and Abstinence

Fasting, abstinence and prayer give us strength to overcome temptations. The Syro-Malabar Church is a community that follows meticulously the observation of ritual fasting and abstinence. The European missionaries qualified the Mar Thoma Christians (*Nazranees*) as 'friends of abstinence'. During these days of abstinence they used to

avoid food items such as meat, fish, egg, milk and milk products. There were several such seasons of abstinence (*Nombu*).

These include: Fifty days in preparation for Easter (*Ambathu nombu*) Twenty-five days in preparation for Christmas (*Irupathanchu Nombu*) Fifteen days in preparation for the feast of the Assumption of our Lady (*Pathinanchu nombu*) Eight days in preparation for the birthday of our Lady (*Ettu nombu*) Three days that come before the start of Lent (*Moону nombu*) Many of these are still observed. These observations help us to grow strong in spirit. The chief aim of these periods of abstinence is not just keeping away from food but improving the Christian life.

Along with abstinence the Mar Thoma Christians were particular in observing certain days of fasting (*Upavaasam*). The literal meaning of the Malayalam word, *upavaasam* is 'to live together'. The idea is to spend the whole day with God in prayer neglecting even food. One is supposed to eat only one full meal on such a day of fasting or *upavaasam*.

Prayer

In the Lord's Prayer we always pray, "Lead us not into temptation." In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus told his disciples who could not keep awake with him: "Get up and pray, that you may not come in to the time of trial" (Luke. 22:46). Jesus prayed for his disciples that they might not falter in their faith during his passion. Jesus said: "Simon, Simon, listen! Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers (Luke. 22: 31-32). These holy words teach us how important prayer is in overcoming temptations.

Acts of Mercy

Abstinence, fasting and prayer should lead us to acts of mercy and charity. We should be prepared to share with the poor the wealth that we save by abstinence and fasting. We must take extra care to make our life more blessed by acts of selfless love. During these seasons of Lent or fasting, we the children of the church give special attention to acts of charity such as consoling those who are sorrowful, giving refuge to those

who are helpless, nursing the sick and looking after orphans. Even children can do things like visiting the sick and praying for them helping the poor through money raised by simple acts of service and encouraging parents in charitable deeds like almsgiving.

Season of Lent

The fourth Season in the liturgical year of the Syro-Malabar Church is the Lenten Season. During this period, we commemorate the time Jesus spent in the wilderness in fasting and prayer in preparation for his public life, and at the same time we use this period to meditate upon the passion of our Lord and to pray. This lenten preparation for Easter is known in Malayalam as *Valiyanombu*. During this season we pay more attention to the reading of the Holy Scriptures and living a life according to the word of God. The first Sunday of Lent, seven weeks before Easter is called Pethurtha. Lent begins that evening. At the start of Lent we celebrate the repentance service where the priest applies ash on our foreheads. The lenten season invites us to recollect our sins and repent over these, and by doing penance for these, to start a new life in Jesus.

Holy Week

We observe the last week of Lent as **Holy Week**. Starting with Palm Sunday that commemorates the festive entry of Jesus into the city of Jerusalem, we begin to meditate more on the passion of Jesus. On Maundy Thursday or the Paschal feast, we remember the institution of the Holy Eucharist and of the priesthood. That evening, in our homes we observe the service of the sacred bread (**Kurisappam**). On Good Friday we recollect the passion, crucifixion and death of Jesus. On Holy Saturday we remember the sorrows of our Lady, the Virgin Mother of God. And on Sunday we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus.

As we pray in the Holy Mass, let us please God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, by fasting, prayer and repentance. Let us thus lead holy lives, overcoming temptation and gaining spiritual strength by living in accordance with the Holy Word of God, a life of abstinence, fasting and prayer.

Let us Pray

O! Jesus, you, who were led to the wilderness by the Holy Spirit and fasted for forty days and nights, help us to be filled with the Spirit of fasting and penance.

Read the Word of God and Narrate

Matthew 4: 1-11



Word of God for our Guidance

"One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew.4:4).

Let us do

Write down some of the acts of penance that you can do during the season of Lent.

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My Decision

I will abstain from meat during
the season of Lent.

Let us find out the answer

1. With which Word of God did Jesus overcome the temptation of the devil who prompted him to make bread out of stones to satisfy his hunger?
2. How could Jesus defeat Satan who tempted him?
3. What are abstinences that are prevalent in the Syro-Malabar Church?
4. What is the message that the season of Lent gives us?
5. From which day does the season of Lent begin?