

“I shall give to you all this power and glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I may give it to whomever I wish. All this will be yours, if you worship me.” These are the words of Satan in one of his attempts to corrupt our Lord. Notice he claims that “all these kingdoms” (all the kingdoms of this world, the whole world) are *his*. Is it true? Is this world his possession? We see that our Lord does not contradict him, Jesus does not even argue the point. So in a certain sense we have to say yes, that he has a real claim. How so? God is the Creator, are they not His? Did God give them to him? To answer that question, notice also that Satan said: they have been handed over to me. By whom? This world was not created as his play thing, God did not give them to him, so who did? What happened is that God gave them to Adam and Adam gave them to Satan. God entrusted the whole earth, indeed all of material creation, to man through Adam, and Adam, in turn, handed it over to Satan.

Adam traded the great good he was given for a false promise. It is not unlike Jack, from the Jack and the beanstalk, being swindled out of his cow. And the sons (descendants) of Adam have been following his lead ever since. We have been given knowledge of God, just like Adam. We have been offered eternal life (immortality, although even greater than what Adam had). And every time a person turns to pride, greed, envy, wrath, snatches at that which is not theirs to have, or whatever it might be, they do the same thing. God then offers His mercy to restore that which was so casually cast aside. Then what happens? So often man once again follows Adam, refusing to admit his sin, coming up with all kinds of justifications, refusing to go to Confession. Take some time to let this sink in: man trades the great goods of God – eternal life with ultimate happiness – for a handful of transient dust. This is not meant to shame but rather by bringing this into clear relief, letting it really sink in, the person will then have the will to rebuff the swindle. We become property of Satan, handing over to him not material goods but our very selves when we turn to sin and then, on top of it, refuse the mercy of God.

All of these kingdoms are mine. Man, perhaps without really realizing what he was doing, at least not fully, freely placed himself under the rule of a cruel and harsh taskmaster, and he could not throw off the yoke. Many became so blinded as to think the enslavement was something good. But even those who longed for freedom were not capable of breaking free of this strongman. All of these kingdoms were indeed his and he couldn't be defeated, at least not by those under his rule. Those who actually desired freedom, true goodness, wanted (and want) a champion, someone who could in fact defeat the tyrant on their behalf. That champion was (and is) our Lord. He went out into the desert, a deserted place – he sought no material aid. He put himself, His humanity, into a tired and weakened state with 40 days of fasting and sleeping outside; it's like a boxer tying at least one arm behind his back to go and face the reigning champion. The tempter approaches to ply his trade, and he fails. Man has his champion, but will he embrace Him, accept Him, be thankful to Him?

Man cannot overcome even the slightest evil by his own power alone; the grace of God, the power of God, is necessary. Set aside any pride that leads to the belief that “I'm a good person because of me,” set aside any tendency to pat yourself on the back, and let the reality of what our Lord has done for you sink in. Only in this way can a person have gratitude for what our Lord has done for us and this gratitude, in turn, inspires a person to now follow this great champion who fought for you out of love for you. God does act in the time and way that is best for us. He allows temptation to happen to strengthen us, so that we can become more than what we are through the exercise of virtue, especially love of Him. God allows us to be tempted, but He does not abandon us to the powers of hell, unless that is what we choose.

All of these kingdoms are mine. This is true in a certain sense – in the sense that man, who was responsible for the earth, the things of this world, surrendered what he had to Satan – but false in another (and greater) sense. The “kingdoms of the world” belong to *God* in an *absolute* way, He created them and He is all-powerful, which means that Satan can “possess” them only by God's permission. Satan's grip on this world is tenuous. Man can reject him at any time and God can act at any time. Notice how the tempter conveniently leaves that part out. One of the singular characteristics of the demons that our Lord Himself identified is that he is a liar: he is a liar and a thief, a murderer from the beginning. Amidst the bombardment of temptations that we face even in everyday life, we must remember that Satan and the other demons are liars because otherwise we are easily

mesmerized by the lies. Every time we sin, every time we fall for some temptation, we have fallen for some lie, the most basic one being: this way is the way to happiness. It never is, it's always a lie. Sin can only lead to death and misery for yourself and for others.

Misdirection. Temptations often go through our mind so quickly that we don't even notice the lie. If a person is afraid of stopping and thinking, if they are afraid of the truth because of what people will think or for any other reason, they will be the property of Satan. Aquinas brings out the misdirection used in temptation. *If you are the Son of God*, do this or that – e.g., turn the stones into bread. The focus of the temptation seems to be on the bread, and of course it seems very reasonable. Yes, why shouldn't I use the power I have to bring myself a little satisfaction? I've been fasting for 40 days, that's something good, now I should reward myself. The whole focus of this train of "thought" is the bread but the overarching temptation is to pride. If you are the Son of God – it is a goading to show off, to "strut your stuff" before me. You are not what you are unless you prove it to me – pride speaks to pride. Be aware of the misdirection in temptation. How often and easily this happens in everyday life. Stop and think. Don't be controlled like a Pavlovian dog. God Himself is on your side, why be afraid? Is it because of fear of what will happen to you in this world? Well then, Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return. That's going to happen anyway, you might as well fight to have a good end.

"I shall give to you all this power and glory....All this will be yours if you worship me." Hey you can be important. Hey people will look up to you. Hey you can count your accomplishments and be, be what? Be proud, just like me. How quickly and easily so many are mesmerized by this promise. What is your reaction to this? If it is a stiff back and a defense of all that I have done, the cause of that reaction is almost certainly an acceptance – past, present, or both – of this lie. It's not too late to reject it and return to God.

If you worship me. The Gospel of Matthew has another detail in this temptation, not found in Luke. It says: All this I will give you if you *fall down* and worship me. Aquinas picks up on this and points out that we make ourselves low by doing this. By falling down and worshipping Satan we become something like dogs, beasts, rather than sons and daughters in our Father's kingdom. And how do we worship Satan? This worship doesn't, by any means, have to be as explicit as something like participation in satanic rites or a black mass or some such thing. We worship him more and more as we turn more and more to sin and farther and farther away from God.

It is written. Notice the use of Scripture, of Truth, in these temptations. Our Lord uses it to rebut the temptations. We should learn from His example. Lies are rebutted with truth. That means we need to learn the Truth. But notice also that Satan attempts to use Scripture to tempt. He corrupts it and does so solely out of self-interest in order to get what he wants. What a common tactic this is. Oh see how good this thing is that I want. In using such tactics people make themselves sons of Satan: You are not sons of Abraham you are sons of the devil. What is your motivation, your intention? Get what I want, or sacrifice of self for the sake of what is right and good and true. The angel of darkness comes disguised as an angel of light. How often people cloak their own desires for self-satisfaction by claiming to look out for the good of others. Don't look around and say, oh that's just politics or big cities or big companies or whatever else it might be. It happens everywhere in everyday life. How often this results in hurling false accusations at people: you see, I'm so good and I'm trying to do good and you're impeding me. Poor little satan, he's just trying to do good for the Lord. If you believe that, plead for mercy. If you don't believe that, then don't use such tactics yourself and don't fall for them either. It is both your right and duty to reject the manipulative tactics falsehood. The Word of God, truth and real goodness, are often twisted for the sake of someone getting what they want. Which do I choose?

How to reject temptation. Notice that our Lord does not carry on a conversation with Satan. He does not say: let's dialogue, let's be friends, let me think about it. He does not have a philosophical discussion with temptation. He cuts it off. This is not to say that there is not a time and place for discussion and so on – things that can be done with people of good will who are seeking truth. But tempters have no interest in that. If you carry on a conversation with temptation, you will lose. Follow the example of our Lord. No, that's a lie. Period. Notice how quickly Satan moves on when that happens.

*God bless you, Fr Kuhn*