

ADORATION VIGIL for Holy Thursday Night

Monsignor Lorenzo Albacete

Meditation on the temptations of Jesus has always been part of the Church's celebration of Lent. The Church during Lent prepares to give birth to new sons and daughters of God, sharing Jesus' relation with his Father. Historically, being a Christian often involved being rejected by your own family, or excluded from the opportunities and benefits of society. It could also entail persecution and death. Jesus' victory over his temptations was an important part of the catechesis designed to help the catechumens overcome their temptations to give up. Today in some places being a Christian can still mean death. In many others it can often mean discrimination and ridicule. Meditation on the temptations of Jesus is still very important.

■ FIRST VIGIL ■

If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become loaves of bread. Mt 4:3

Take and eat; this is my body. Mt 26:26

Meditation

There is only one temptation. All particular temptations are expressions of this one original or "primordial" temptation. This is the temptation to believe that the fulfillment of the desires of the human heart depends entirely on us. Dependence on another leaves us at the mercy of what we

cannot control. Therefore, we are tempted to reject all forms of dependence. The most radical form of dependence is love. Therefore, the original temptation is to deny that our existence is a pure and perfect gift of an infinite Love that deserves to be loved in return. The fullest revelation that God is love is the Incarnation of Christ. Therefore, the primordial temptation is to reject the Incarnation and its consequences.

Even Jesus himself was subject to this temptation. He was tempted to deny the very experience of his own identity: "If you are the Son of God..." The boldness of the temptation is terrifying. The temptation of Jesus is to doubt his own identity as the Father's Son. It is really not a matter of proving his divinity; it is a temptation to reject his absolute dependence on the Father as the revelation of his own divinity! It is to betray the revelation of God as Trinity, of God as Love.

The institution of the Eucharist is Jesus' ultimate rejection of this temptation. It is the affirmation of his mission to make his relationship to his Father, his abandonment to the Father, his offering of his life to the Father as the nourishment that sustains human life. Through the Eucharist, Jesus offers his relationship to the Father as a gift to us, allowing us to offer with him our own lives as an act of pure love as he did on the cross, allowing us to share the Father's gift of divine life to his humanity as the source of our life, as the "bread" that sustains our own humanity. Jesus' rejection of the temptation bears fruits of life for us "when we eat this bread and drink this cup" until he returns in glory to share his victory over all that opposes the Father's gift of existence.

Prayer

I adore you, Lord Jesus Christ, present in the Blessed Sacrament as the Father's gift of unconditional love.

In the Eucharist you have left us your own relationship with the Father as the source of life. May it shape my desires, my thoughts, my judgments, and my actions so that you might be all in all. Amen.

■ SECOND VIGIL ■

If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you," and "with their hands they will support you," lest you dash your foot against a stone. Mt 4:6

Put your sword back into its sheath, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot call upon my Father and he will not provide me at this moment with more than twelve legions of angels? Mt 26:52-53

Meditation

Once again the Tempter strikes at the relation between Jesus and the Father. "If you are the Son of God..." Jesus is tempted to question the mystery of his own identity. All temptations aim at denying the truth of the mystery of the Incarnation. Saint John the Evangelist writes that the Holy Spirit, the "Spirit of Truth," can be recognized because he does not separate the Son of God from the flesh, that is, because he confirms the identity of Jesus as the Incarnate Son of the Father. The spirit that separates the Son of God from the flesh is the Anti-Christ, the spirit of the "lie" (cf. 1 Jn 4:1-3).

In this temptation, the Tempter argues that if Jesus is the Son of God, he would be able to avoid his death. We experience this temptation when we wonder why the followers of

Jesus are not spared death. It is our fear of death that gives temptation its power. But Jesus did not avoid his confrontation with death. He exposes himself to the fear of death in order to conquer it with the confidence that comes from the love that unites him with the Father. He will defeat death by freely embracing his death with absolute confidence. God is love, and love is stronger than death.

Jesus himself pointed to the Eucharist as the means to overcome the power of death. His Body and Blood are the source of a life that is stronger than the power of death, a life sustained by the power of the Love that is God. Jesus remains with us in the Blessed Sacrament precisely as the proclamation of the victory of God's love over death. The Eucharist is his reply to the temptation, emptying it of its power. Allowing the Eucharist to shape our life will free us too from the fear of death.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ you are present in the Eucharist as the Son of God in human flesh, your presence is the source of a life stronger than death. Strengthen our frail humanity by the power of the Holy Spirit, that we might be powerful witnesses that death is not the last word about human destiny. Amen.

■ THIRD VIGIL ■

The devil...showed him all the kingdoms of the world in their magnificence, and he said to him, "All these I shall give to you, if you will prostrate yourself and worship me." At this, Jesus said to him, "Get away, Satan! It is written:/"

“The Lord, your God, shall you worship/ and him alone shall you serve.”

Mt 4:8-10

My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?

Ps 22:2

All the ends of the earth/ will worship and turn to the LORD;/ All the families of nations/ will bow low before you./ For kingship belongs to the LORD,/ the ruler over the nations./ All who sleep in the earth/ will bow low before God;/ All who have gone down into the dust/ will kneel in homage.

Ps 22:28-30

Meditation

This last temptation goes directly to the heart of the issue of what it means to be human and how sharing Christ's life is the path to the fulfillment of the needs and desires of the heart. What does it mean for the man Jesus to be the Son of God? What does it mean for us to be “sons in the Son”? It is a matter of the nature of belonging. Do we experience belonging as a threat to our freedom, or as a fulfillment of our identity? To be human is to live for a reality greater than we—, or is it to live for ourselves? The Tempter suggests to Jesus that belonging to the Father is a loss of both freedom and the power to obtain the satisfaction of our desires, and that we should participate in his rebellion against God's Fatherhood. This is what will give us the power to achieve our goals and obtain what we need.

Jesus rejects this temptation. His belonging to the Father is not a limitation of his human freedom; on the contrary, it is its fulfillment! There is no neutral ground: either we belong to God with Jesus and are truly free, or we belong to the Father of lies and are overpowered by death. Jesus chose

the path of free, loving dependence on the Father, and he affirmed this choice at the moment of his death when he experienced the dark night of the Father's apparent absence.

The Eucharist, as the memorial of his Passion, is the sacramental embodiment of this decision. It is an appeal, an invitation to our liberty. To celebrate and receive the Eucharist is to affirm Jesus' choice, to say yes to his invitation to accept the risk of following along the path of radical belonging to the Father in order to be fully free.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, you are the truth of my life. Receiving you in the Eucharist and adoring you in the Blessed Sacrament, I affirm your absolute belonging to the Father as the fulfillment of my own humanity. Share with us the Holy Spirit, that we might live no longer for ourselves, but for you. Amen.

(Monsignor Lorenzo Albacete († 2014) was a theologian and former scientist, responsible for the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation in the USA, based in New York. He was author of God at the Ritz (Crossroad Publishing).

The Greatest Miracle by Msgr. Lorenzo Albacete

I always find it funny, in a Monty-Python way, that when told that Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead, some of the authorities decided that He had to die. I mean, what's going on? What kind of mind

works that way? If I see or hear that someone whom I consider an enemy has raised from the dead a stinking corpse, I'd certainly review my opinion about him. At least I'd change my opposition tactics! How can these people be so stupid?

Jesus himself, in the parable about Lazarus and the Rich Man, had said that if they didn't believe “Moses and the prophets” they were not going to be convinced by anyone coming back from the dead. Is there nothing, no miracle, which at the very least will give pause to non-believers?

At the Last Supper Jesus identified what He believed would be such a miracle. It was the unity existing among his followers. This unity would convince the “world” that He was indeed the “One Sent” by the Father. Now, this is an amazing thing. It implies that the unity that Jesus asked for, for his disciples, is the greatest miracle that He is capable of performing. It is the decisive one, and the one indisputable evidence about who He is. This unity is more amazing, more astounding, and more exceptional than the return to life of a dead man!

In order to be what Jesus says, the unity between his followers must not be a fruit of their efforts. It must be a unity no human effort can achieve. It must be a unity that can only come from “above” us, from a Source greater than us. It must be a unity that embraces all the dimensions of human life, a unity that touches and brings together human beings at the deepest root of their identities. As such, it must be a perfect unity that is absolutely compatible with personal liberty, since without this liberty our lives would not be human. The only way this is possible is if this unity is itself what makes personal liberty possible, thus creating our experience of being unique and unrepeatable persons, the experience of saying “I.” Our experience of identity itself must point toward this unity; it must desire it as an unquenchable need. The Mystery that the religious sense seeks, the Mystery that corresponds to the primordial desires or exigencies of the human heart, must be a Mystery of Unity and Freedom as absolutely inseparable, as One. And as such it must appear in history, if it is true that the Mystery absolutely beyond our reach has nevertheless become human flesh, human history.

That is why “Jesus” does not offer Himself alone as evidence. He doesn't “testify” to Himself, He said. He always appears involved, so to speak, in a Unity that defines Him, and what He yearns to do is to share this Unity with human beings. The personal presence of Jesus is not limited to the body conceived in Mary's womb. The presence in the flesh that He seeks, that He is working for, is the unity in flesh and blood between the followers of Christ. This is the real “Body of Christ.” When we speak today of the “real presence” of Christ, we mostly refer to the sacramental presence

in the Eucharist. At one time that was not so. The presence of the "One Sent" in the flesh was certainly real in the body of the son of Mary, the body crucified on Calvary. The presence of the One Sent in human flesh was certainly real in the Risen Body of Christ touched by the Thomas who doubted. But as He said Himself, there is more, and "blessed" are those who can grasp this more through faith. There is another form of the presence in the flesh of the One Sent. The Eucharistic presence of the One Sent is certainly as real as any of these others, but its purpose is to create what was called the Real Presence of Christ, namely the unity between his followers that constitute His Body. If we wish to find the Mystery for which the heart yearns, it is for this incarnate unity, this unity in history, that we must search.

"Moses and the prophets" are a greater miracle than the resurrection of a dead man because they were already part of the formation of a people, a history, a tradition, a belonging that points to this miracle of divine and human unity.

Which brings us to *Why the Church*, Father Giussani's book that has just been published in English. Buy it. Read it. Study it. Remember, it's more revealing of the Mystery than seeing someone come out of a tomb.