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## *What Will You Worship in the Next Forty Days?*

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**A Sermon by the Very Reverend Sam Candler  
The First Sunday of Lent**

*Jesus said, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him."  
Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.  
- Matthew 4:10-11*

What will you worship during the next forty days?

For me, the answer is painfully obvious every Spring. Just as Spring arrives every year, so also does Spring Training arrive. It is a weakness, even an addiction, that I freely confess on the First Sunday of Lent. During the next forty days, I will worship baseball. There is something about its order, something about its pace, something about its long moments of study punctuated by drama that transports me to another dimension.

Some of you, surely, will also worship baseball during the next forty days. I have not given it up for Lent, but I will endeavor to turn my love of the game towards a greater love for God also. Baseball is a good thing, but not if it distracts me from the living grace of God.

Some of you, always, will worship food and consumption. You will yearn for that next sweet goodie without even realizing you are yearning for it. --Except those of you have decided to "give up" something for Lent. I applaud that discipline of giving something up for forty days.

When you give up, say, chocolate, for forty days, you are providing for yourself a means of confession. Every time you crave chocolate during the season of Lent, you will also say, "Oh, I have given that up for Lent." Then, you will have occasion to turn that craving, that temptation, into prayer. At least that's the way it's supposed to work. When you crave the chocolate, say, you are reminded to turn that craving into prayer to the living God. Chocolate is a good thing, but not if it distracts you from the living grace of God.

"If you are the son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." Those were the words of the Tempter to our Lord, during his forty days of Lent. There's nothing wrong with chocolate, and there's nothing wrong with bread. The temptation is to feel like you should always get what you crave.

For all of us, Lent is the season to discover what our temptations really are. Jesus sure discovered his temptations during the forty days of wilderness. The first was to exploit his power and position. The Tempter came and said to him, "*If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.*" (Today we might say, "*Command this water to become a cup of Starbucks coffee.*") But Jesus answered, "*It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'*"

Each of us has some position, some power, even the very least of us. That position and that power can be good things. But

each of us is tempted to use that power for our own appetites. What do we want at the moment? Do we really need this or that? The tyranny of the urgent tempts us to exploit our power for something less than God.

Sure, Jesus was hungry. He had fasted forty days and forty nights. But he didn't need food in that time of anxiety. He did not need a new car, or a new set of clothes, or a new house, or a new church, or a new loaf of bread, or a new cup of coffee, or a new something else. Those are all good things, but he really needed something else. He needed the quiet humility of the Word of God. That is what he would live by.

*"Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, (That's like Satan putting Jesus on the top of our Cathedral bell tower!) 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.'" Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"*

I especially like this particular part of the interchange between Jesus and Satan, because they sound like two wise Jewish rabbis debating each other, or two biblical scholars debating each other, or maybe even two friends debating each other.

They are both using scripture! After Jesus has quoted scripture as a reason not to turn stones into bread, Satan uses scripture to test Jesus. Yes, Satan can certainly quote scripture; "it says right here that "God will command his angels concerning you, and they will bear you up lest you dash your foot against a stone."

That's the Bible! Should we always believe those who quote scripture? Scripture, too, is a good thing. But there are some people who worship scripture more than they worship God. There is such a thing as worshipping scripture more than God. Jesus did not let even that temptation mislead him.

But this second temptation is larger than that. The second temptation is to turn the tables. The second temptation is to tempt God. Let's just see whether God really likes me. Let's just see whether God will protect me. Let's just see.

Oh, if it's not God we are testing, then we are sure testing one another, aren't we? We are sure testing each other's love. Let's just see if she loves me. Let's just see if he notices that I have changed. Let's just see if they really care.

The trust of others is surely a good thing. But sometimes our temptation is to put that trust of others to the test! Who are you putting to the test? Your spouse? Your lover? Your family? Ah, your school, your church, your country? Watch out: chances are the person you are putting to the test is the very person who loves you the most.

Jesus said, "Again it is written, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."

*"Then the devil took him to a very high mountain (the devil took Jesus to the top of the urban skyscraper!) and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me."*

There sure are a lot of kingdoms in this world. I belong to a lot of them myself. I belong to a family. I serve on the boards of several very fine institutions; they lay a claim on me. I volunteer at all sorts of wonderful organizations. I belong to a neighborhood. I belong to a city and pay taxes here. I belong to a country and pay taxes to it.

These are kingdoms, and—once again—they are very good ones. But none of them is worthy of my ultimate worship.

But Jesus says, "Away with you Satan! (The word, Satan, means "Tempter.") Away with you, you Tempter. It is written, "Worship the Lord your God and serve only him."

That is the great commandment. Our ultimate devotion is God alone. Our ultimate allegiance is God alone. Every other reality is only secondary to this great God, the God above all.

That's the way Jesus answered the third temptation. And as soon as he did, "the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him." Yes, as soon as Jesus turned to worship God, and God alone, the grace of angels appeared.

What will you be tempted to worship during the next forty days? Pay attention to them, for they are all good things: Baseball, chocolate, bread, power, position, the trust of others, even the Bible. Temptation comes from things that can be used for good! Lent is the time to distinguish between using them for good or not. When we distinguish the difference, when we practice turning to God alone, the living grace of angels appears.

All the kingdoms of this world do not save us, because only God can show us grace. It is that God, of grace, that we worship. It is to that God that we pray on this First Sunday of Lent, "Lord, have mercy." Lord, have mercy.

AMEN.

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