



Christian Education

A series of Sermons and Occasional Papers
From the clergy and members
of Holy Trinity Church
Forbes Park, Makati

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Title: **"The Time of Trial"**
Comment: Insert Comment here
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Readings for this Sunday:

First Reading Deuteronomy 26:5-11
Second Reading Romans 10:8b-13
Gospel Luke 4:1-13

Every time we say the Lord's Prayer, we dutifully include the petition, "And lead us not into temptation." Most thoughtful people say it with a bit of a hesitation or even suspicion, as if that can't be quite right. It really *does* sound as though we are suspecting that *the Lord Himself* is the one tempting us: perversely taking us down the garden path to destruction against our will. But that's *not* what it means. Perhaps it will help to realize that when the words of that prayer were first written down, the "temptation" being referred to was actually the trials that would come at the fiery end of the world. Christians were praying that God would spare humankind from its just desserts which some of their teachers, including St. Paul in his earlier years, said would come very, very soon. The modern language version of the Lord's Prayer helps us to understand what we're saying. It runs: "Save us from the *time of trial*." In other words, "Lord, have mercy upon the world and give us another chance."

The idea of us being in a time of trial, either through temptation to sin or having to live through perilous times, is not only an important theme in Lent, it is also a fact of human life. This will be made clear to those who will be participating in this year's Lenten Study, led by Deacon Joe Mock, as we read Archbishop William's book, *Christ on Trial*. But even those who are not able to attend will hear in the Lenten readings

and hymns the idea that the Christian's life will be a series of trials, or tests, meant not so much to *punish* as to *challenge* and incite us to greater spiritual maturity.

A point sometimes lost on people who hear today's Gospel is the very first statement made: that after his Baptism in the Jordan River Jesus is led into the wilderness *not* by the Devil who will eventually tempt him, but by the *Spirit of God* who is also testing him. In the Spirit's case it's not to see Jesus fail, but to help him discover who he really is. Part of that testing involves (if you forgive my contemporary movie illusion) coming to terms with "the dark side of the Force." We see it in the story as the voice of Satan suggesting to Jesus that he claim his divine side and trash the human one. It's a battle that rages in all of us in our lives, too. We know that there is more to us than our weak human nature. We feel that we are called to be something better. And yet we are tempted to think that this can be done alone, without any outside help. The voices in our heads and in the society around us tell us that "God is in us" already, or worse that we are ourselves divine, but without reference to *Christ* who in fact came to *make* us divine through his death and resurrection.

Jesus' response to his time of testing is to refuse to perform for his own benefit. He knows that who he is, God's presence on earth, fully divine yet fully human, is meant for a higher calling than just his own survival and he turns the devil away with well-chosen words of Scripture. It looks and sounds as though Jesus has won the battle. Perhaps we feel that *we* have won with him. But that ignores the ominous last phrase of the gospel today: "the devil left him *until an opportune time.*"

And so it still is, even for us, even today. We can watch Jesus, our hero, wow the competition and perform miracles throughout the gospel accounts, but we'll be deluding ourselves to think that the war is over for those of us who choose to follow him. No, the same subtle turns of phrase, the same glittering temptations of wealth and fame and power are still there, waiting for the "opportune time."

The life of every Christian is marked by the experience of radical temptation. The cult of money, political power exercised with contempt for the needs of the poor, the use

of religion as a façade for human ambition: these are some of the highly polished tools of the Evil One whose greatest ally is the belief by so many that *he doesn't exist*.

Yes, indeed, Lord: "save us from the time of trial," if it is possible, and letting us experience the trial isn't part of your will for our growth and maturity. But when comes, let it make us strong by showing us who we are, in our redeemed nature as your children and members of your kingdom. And help us to know that we won't have to face anything alone: not the wilderness, not our human nature, not even Satan himself. You have been there, and you are with us now.