

The Forty Days' Fast of Jesus

Accompanied by Lazarus, Jesus went to the inn belonging to the latter situated near the desert. It was just before the hour at which the Sabbath began.

Lazarus was the only one whom Jesus had told that after forty days, He would return. From this inn He began His journey into the desert alone and barefoot. He went at first, not toward Jericho, but southward toward Bethlehem, as if He wished to pass between the residence of Anne's

relatives and that of Joseph's near Maspha. But He turned off toward the Jordan, shunned the different cities and villages by taking the footpaths around them, and passed that place near which the Ark had once stood and at which John had celebrated the feast.

About one hour's distance from Jericho, He ascended the mountain and entered a spacious grotto. This mountain rises to the southeast of Jericho, and faces Madian across the Jordan.

Jesus began His fast here near Jericho, continued it in different parts of the desert on the other side of the Jordan, and after the devil had borne Him to the top of the mountain, concluded it where it had been commenced. From the summit of this mountain, which is in some parts covered with low brushwood, in others barren and desolate, the view is very extended. Properly speaking, it is not so high as Jerusalem, because it lies on a lower level; but rising abruptly from low surroundings, its solitary grandeur is the more striking. The height that commands the whole plateau upon which stand the Holy City and its environs is the Mount of Calvary, the loftiest point of which is almost on a level with the highest parts of the Temple. On the south side, the nearest to Bethlehem, Jerusalem is flanked by rocks dangerously steep. There was no gate on this side, the whole being taken up by palaces.

It was night when Jesus climbed that steep, wild mountain in the desert now called Mount Quarantania. Three spurs, each containing a grotto, rise one above another. Jesus climbed to the topmost of all, from the back of which one could gaze down into the steep, gloomy abyss below. The whole mountain was full of frightfully dangerous chasms. Four hundred years before, a Prophet, whose name I forget, had sojourned in that same cave. Elias, also, had dwelt there secretly for a long time and had enlarged it.



Sometimes, without anyone's knowing whence he came, he used to go down among the inhabitants of the surrounding district to prophesy and restore peace. About twenty-five Essenians one hundred and fifty years ago dwelt on this mountain. It was at its foot that the camp of the Israelites was pitched when, with the Ark of the Covenant, they marched around Jericho to the sound of trumpets. The fountain whose water Eliseus rendered sweet was not far off. St. Helena caused these grottoes to be transformed into chapels. In one of them, I once saw on the wall a picture of the Temptation. At a later period a convent arose on the summit of the mountain. I wondered how the workmen could get up there. Helena erected churches on numerous sacred spots. It was she who built the church over Mother Anne's birthplace two hours from Sephoris. In Sephoris itself Anne's parents owned a house. How sad that most of these holy places have gone to ruin, some even lost to memory! When as a young girl I used to go before the day through the snows of winter to Coesfeld to church, I used to see all those holy places so plainly. And I often saw how good men, to save them from destruction, would cast themselves flat in the road before the destroying soldiers.

The words of Scripture: "He was led by the Spirit into the desert," mean that the Holy Spirit, who descended upon Jesus at the moment of His baptism when He allowed His Humanity to be, in some measure, visibly penetrated by the Divinity, impelled Him to go into the desert to prepare as Man in close communication with His Heavenly Father for His vocation to suffering.

Jesus, kneeling in the grotto with outstretched arms, prayed to His Heavenly Father for strength and courage in all the sufferings that awaited Him. He saw all in advance, and begged for the grace necessary for each. All His afflictions, all His pains passed before me in vision, and I saw Him receiving consolation and merit for everyone. A cloud of white light, large like a church, descended and hovered over Him. At the end of each prayer spirits approached Him. When close to Him, they assumed a human form, offered Him homage, and presented to Him consolation and promises from On High. I saw then that Jesus here in the desert acquired for us all our consolation, all our strength, our help, our victory in temptation; purchased for us merit in struggle and conquest; gave value to our fasting and mortifications; and offered to God the Father all His future labors and sufferings, in order to give worth to the prayers and spiritual works of all His faithful followers in the ages to come. I saw the treasure that He thereby laid up for the Church, and which she, in the forty days' fast, opens to her children. During this prayer, Jesus sweat Blood.

From this mountain Jesus went down again toward the Jordan to the country between Gilgal and John's place of baptism, about an hour further on to the

south. He crossed that narrow but deep part of the river on a beam, and journeyed on leaving Bethabara to the right. Crossing several highroads that led to the Jordan, He took the rugged mountain paths from the southeast through the wilderness. Proceeding through the valley leading to Callirrhoe, He crossed a small stream and climbed a mountain spur a little to the north where Jachza lies in a valley opposite. The Children of Israel defeated Sihon, king of the Amorrhites, here in a battle in which the Israelites were only three against sixteen. But God wrought a miracle in behalf of His people. A frightful noise swept over the Amorrhites and terrified them.

Jesus was now upon a very wild mountain range about nine hours from the Jordan, and far more savage and desolate than the one near Jericho, almost opposite to which it lies.

The Divinity of Jesus, as well as His mission, was hidden from Satan. The words: "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased," were understood by Satan as spoken of a mere human being, a Prophet. Jesus had already been frequently and in many ways interiorly afflicted. The first temptation that He experienced was: "This nation is so corrupt. Shall I suffer all this and yet not perfect the work for which I came upon earth?" But with infinite love and mercy, He conquered the temptation in the face of all His torments.

Jesus prayed in the grotto sometimes prostrate, again kneeling, or standing. He wore His customary dress, but ungirded, loose and flowing, His feet bare. His mantle, a pair of wallets, and the girdle lay on the ground nearby. Daily was His labor of prayer different; daily did He acquire for us new graces, those of today unlike those of the preceding eve. Were it not for this labor of His, our resistance against temptation would never have been meritorious. Jesus neither ate nor drank, but I saw Him strengthened by angels. He was not emaciated by His long fast, though He became perfectly pale and white. The grotto was not quite on the summit of the mountain. In it was an aperture through which the wind blew chill and raw, for at that season it was cold and foggy. The rocky walls of the grotto were streaked with colored veins; had they been polished, one would have thought them painted. There was space enough in it to afford room for Jesus, whether kneeling or prostrate, without His being directly under the aperture. The rock outside was overgrown by straggling briars.

One day I saw Jesus prostrate on His face. His unsandaled feet were red, wounded by the rugged roads, for He had come to the wilderness barefoot. At times He arose, and again prayed lying prostrate. He was surrounded by light. Suddenly a sound from Heaven was heard, light streamed into the grotto, and myriads of angels appeared bearing with them all kinds of things.

I was so afflicted, so overcome, that I felt as if pressed into the rocky wall of the grotto; and, filled with the sensation of one falling, I began to cry out: "I shall fall! I shall fall next to my Jesus!"

And now I beheld the angelic band bending low before Jesus, offering Him their homage, and begging leave to unfold to Him their mission. They questioned Him as to whether it was still His will to suffer as man for the human race, as it had been His will to leave the bosom of His Heavenly Father, to become incarnate in the Virgin's womb. When Jesus answered in the affirmative, accepting His sufferings anew, the angels put together before Him a high cross, the parts of which they had brought with them. It was in shape such as I always see it, of four pieces, as I always see the winepress of the cross. The upper part of the trunk, that is the part that arose between two inserted arms, was likewise separate. Five angels bore the lower portion; three, the upper; three, the left and three, the right arm; three, the ledge whereon His feet rested; and three carried a ladder. Another had a basket full of ropes, cords, and tools, while others bore the spear, the reed, the rods, the scourges, the crown of thorns, the nails, the robes of derision—in a word, all that figured in His Passion.

The cross appeared to be hollow. It could be opened like a cupboard, and then it displayed the innumerable instruments of torture with which it was filled. In the central part, where Jesus' Heart was broken, were entwined all possible emblems of pain in all kinds of frightful instruments, and the color of the cross itself was heartrending, the color of blood.

The various parts presented different tints symbolical of the pain there to be endured, but all, like so many streams, converged to the heart. The different instruments were likewise symbolical of future pains.

In the cross were also vessels of vinegar and gall, as well as ointment, myrrh, and something like herbs, prefiguring perhaps to Jesus His death and burial. There were also numbers of open scrolls like billets of about a hand in width. They were of various colors, and on them were written pains and labors to be realized by sufferings of innumerable kinds. The colors were significant of the several degrees and species of darkness which were to be enlightened and dissipated by that suffering. What was utterly lost was typified by black; aridity, dryness, agitation, confusion, negligence were symbolized by brown; red was significant of all that was heavy, earthly, sensual; while yellow betokened effeminacy and horror of suffering. Some of the scrolls were half yellow and half red; they had to be bleached entirely white. There were others white like currents of milk, and the writing on them shone and glittered. They signified the won, the finished.

These colored bands of writing were like the summing up of all the pains that

Jesus would have to endure in His mortal life, all His labors, all that the Apostles and others would cause Him to suffer.

Then there appeared before Him, as in a procession, all those men through whom were to come the most keenly felt sufferings He would have to endure, the malice of the Pharisees, the treason of Judas, the insults of the Jews at His bitter and ignominious death.

The angels arranged all, unfolded all before the Saviour, doing all with unspeakable reverence, like priests performing the holiest functions. While thus the entire Passion was unfolded and passed in detail before His gaze, I saw Jesus and the angels weeping.

On another occasion, I saw the angels placing before Jesus the ingratitude of men, the skepticism, the scorn, the mockery, the treachery, the denial of friends and of enemies up to the moment of His death and after it. All passed before Him in pictures, as also those sufferings and labors of His that would bear no fruit. But for His consolation, they showed Him likewise all that would be gained by them. As these pictures floated past, the angels pointed them out with a motion of the hand.

In all these visions of Jesus' Passion, I always saw His cross composed of five kinds of wood, the arms set in with a wedge under each, and a block upon which the feet were to rest. The piece above the head, on which was the inscription, I saw put on separately, for the trunk of the cross was too low to admit of the writing over the head. It fitted on like the cover on a needle case.

Jesus Tempted in Many Ways by Satan

Satan knew not of the Divinity of Christ. He took Him for a Prophet. He had noted His holiness from early youth, as also that of His Mother. But Mary took no notice whatever of Satan. She never listened to a temptation. There was nothing in her upon which Satan could fasten. Though the fairest of women, the fairest of virgins, she never thought of a suitor excepting at the holy lottery, at the flowering of the rods in the Temple, when there was question of her marriage. That Jesus was wanting in a certain pharisaical severity toward His disciples in nonessential points, puzzled the wicked fiend. He took Him for a man, because the pretended irregularities of His disciples scandalized the Jews.

As Satan had often seen Jesus fired with zeal, he thought at one time to irritate Him by assuming the appearance of one of the disciples who had followed Him thither; and as he had also seen examples of His tenderness of heart, he tried at another time, under the form of a decrepit old man, to excite His compassion; and again as an Essenian, to dispute with Him. I saw him therefore at the entrance of the grotto under the form of the son of one

of the three widows, a youth especially loved by Jesus. He made a noise to attract attention, thinking that Jesus would be displeased at His disciple's following Him against His prohibition. Jesus did not look toward him even once. Then Satan put his head in and began to talk, first of one thing, then of another, and at last of John the Baptist who, he said, was very indignant at Jesus for encroaching upon his rights, by allowing His disciples to baptize from time to time.

Foiled in this first ruse, Satan tried another. He sent seven, eight, or nine apparitions of the disciples into the grotto. In they came one after another, saying to Jesus that Eustachius had informed them that He was there, and that they had sought Him with so much anxiety. They begged Him not to expose His life in that wild abode, not to abandon them. The whole world was talking about Him, they continued, and He should not allow such and such things to be said. But Jesus' only reply was: "Withdraw, Satan! It is not yet time," and the phantoms disappeared.

Again Satan drew near under the form of a feeble old man, a venerable Essenian, toiling painfully up the steep mountain. The ascent seemed so difficult for him that, really, I pitied him. Approaching the grotto, with a loud groan he fell fainting from exhaustion at its entrance. But Jesus took no notice of him, not even by a glance. Then the old man arose with an effort, and introduced himself as an Essenian from Mount Carmel. He had, he said, heard of Jesus and, though almost worn out by the effort, had followed Him thither in order to sit with Him a little while and converse on holy things. He too knew what it was to fast and to pray, and when two joined their prayers to God, edification became greater. Jesus uttered a few words only, such as: "Retire, Satan! It is not yet time." Then I discovered that it was Satan, for as he turned away and vanished, I saw him becoming dark and horrible to behold. I felt like laughing when I thought of his throwing himself on the ground and of having to pick himself up again.

When Satan next came to tempt Jesus, he assumed the appearance of old Eliud. Satan must have known that His Cross and Passion had been shown to Jesus by the angels, for he said that he had had a revelation of the heavy trials in store for Him, and that he felt He would not be able to resist them. For a forty days' fast, he continued, Jesus was not in a state; therefore, urged by love for Him, he had come to see Him once more, to beg to be allowed to share His wild abode and assume part of His vow. Jesus noticed not the tempter, but raising His hands to Heaven, He said: "My Father, take this temptation from Me!" whereupon Satan vanished in a horrible form. Jesus was kneeling in prayer when, after a time, I saw three youths approaching. They were those who, on His first departure from Nazareth,

were with Him and who subsequently abandoned Him. They appeared to approach timidly. They cast themselves on the ground before Him, complaining that they could find no rest until He pardoned them. They begged Him to have mercy on them, to receive them again to favor, and allow them to share His fast as a penance for their defection, and they promised thenceforth to be His most faithful disciples. They had ventured into the grotto, and they surrounded Jesus with tears and loud lamentation. Jesus rose from His knees, raised His hands to God, and the apparitions vanished.

On another day as He knelt in the grotto praying, I beheld Satan in a glittering robe borne, as it were, through the air up the steepest and highest side of the rock. This precipitous, inaccessible side faced to the east; in it were some apertures opening into the grotto. Jesus glanced not toward Satan, who was now intent on passing himself off for an angel. But he was a poor imitation, for the light that enveloped him was far from transparent. It looked as if it had been smeared on, and his robe was stiff and harsh, while those of the angels are soft and light and transparent. Hovering at the entrance of the grotto, Satan spoke: "I have been sent by Thy Father to console Thee." Jesus turned not toward him. Then Satan flew around to the steep, inaccessible side of the grotto and, peering in through one of the apertures, called to Jesus to witness a proof of his angelic nature, since he could hover there without support. But Jesus noticed him not. Seeing himself foiled in every attempt, Satan became quite horrible, and made as if he would seize Jesus in his claws through the aperture. His figure grew still more frightful and he vanished. Jesus looked not after him.

Satan came next under the appearance of an aged solitary from Mount Sinai. He was quite wild, almost savage-looking, with his long beard and scanty covering, a rough skin being his only garment. But there was something false and cunning in his countenance as he climbed painfully up the mountain. Entering the grotto, he addressed Jesus, saying that an Essenian from Mount Carmel had visited him and told him of the baptism, also of the wisdom, the miracles, and the present rigorous fasting of Jesus. Hearing which, notwithstanding his great age, he had come all the way to see Him, to converse with Him, for he himself had long experience in the practice of mortification. He told Jesus that He should now desist from further fasting, that he would free Him from what remained, and he went on with much more talk in the same strain. Jesus, looking aside, said: "Depart from Me, Satan!" At these words, the evil one grew dark and, like a huge, black ball, rolled with a crash down the mountain.

Then I asked myself how it was that Christ's Divinity remained so concealed

from Satan. And I received the following instruction: I understood clearly that it was the most incomprehensible advantage for men that neither they nor Satan knew of Christ's Divinity, and that they were thereby to learn how to exercise faith. The Lord said one word to me that I still remember. «Man," said He, «knew not that the serpent tempting him was Satan; in like manner, Satan was not to know that He who redeemed man was God." I saw too that the Divinity of Christ was not made known to Satan until the moment in which He freed the souls from Limbo.

On one of the subsequent days, I saw Satan under the form of a distinguished man of Jerusalem. He approached the cave in which Jesus was praying and told Him that sympathy had urged him to come to Him, for he felt assured that He was called to give freedom to the Jewish nation. Then he related all the reports, all the discussions rife in Jerusalem on His account, and told Him that he had come to offer his support in the good cause. He was one of Herod's officers, he said. Jesus might unhesitatingly accompany him back to Jerusalem, might even take up His abode in Herod's palace, where He could lie concealed, gather His followers around Him, and set His undertaking on foot. And he urged Him to return with him at once. The pretended officer laid his proposal before Jesus in a multiplicity of words. Jesus looked not toward him, but continued earnestly to pray. Then I saw Satan retreating, his form becoming frightful, fire and smoke bursting from his nostrils, until at last he vanished.

When Jesus began to hunger, and especially to thirst, Satan appeared in the form of a pious hermit and exclaimed: "I am so hungry! I pray Thee give me of the fruits growing here on the mountain outside Thy grotto. I would pluck none of it without asking the owner" (pretending that he took Jesus for the owner), "then let us sit together and talk of good things." Not at the entrance of the grotto, but on the opposite side, that is, toward the east, and at a little distance, grew figs and berries, and another kind of fruit something like nuts, though with soft shells like those of the medlar. Jesus answered the false hermit: "Depart from Me! Thou art from the very beginning liar. Harm not the fruit!" Then I saw Satan as a little somber figure hurrying off, a black vapor exhaling from him.

But he returned again in the form of a traveler, and asked Jesus for permission to eat of the fine grapes growing nearby, because they were so good for thirst. But Jesus gave him no answer, did not even look at him. On the following day, Satan tempted Jesus again on the same head, only this time it was with a spring instead of fruit.

Satan Tempts Jesus by Magical Arts

Satan appeared to Jesus in the grotto as a magician and philosopher. He told Him that he had come to Him as to a wise man, and that he would show Him that he, too, could exhibit marvels. Then he showed Him hanging on his hand a piece of apparatus like a globe, or perhaps still more like a bird cage. Jesus would not look at the tempter, much less into the globe as Satan desired, but turning His back on him, He left the grotto. I saw that a look into Satan's raree-show disclosed the most magnificent scenes from nature, lovely pleasure gardens full of shady groves, cool fountains, richly laden fruit trees, luscious grapes, etc. All seemed to be within one's reach, and all was constantly dissolving into ever more beautiful, more enticing scenes. Jesus turned His back on Satan, and he vanished.

This was another temptation to interrupt the fast of Jesus, who now began to thirst and to experience the pangs of hunger. Satan did not yet know what to think of Him. He was aware, it is true, of the Prophecies relating to Him and he felt that He exercised power over himself, but he did not yet know that Jesus was God. He did not know even that He was the Messiah whose advent he so dreaded, since he beheld Him fasting, hungering, enduring temptation; since he saw Him so poor, suffering in so many ways; in a word, since he saw Him in all things so like an ordinary man. In this Satan was as blind as the Pharisees. He looked upon Jesus as a holy man whom temptation might lead to a fall.