

Matthew: 4:1–11

From Catena Aurea:

1. Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the Devil.
2. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He was afterward an hungred.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. xiii.) Whoever thou art then that after thy baptism sufferest grievous trials, be not troubled thereat; for this thou receivedst arms, to fight, not to sit idle. God does not hold all trial from us; first, that we may feel that we are become stronger; secondly, that we may not be puffed up by the greatness of the gifts we have received; thirdly, that the Devil may have experience that we have entirely renounced him; fourthly, that by it we may be made stronger; fifthly, that we may receive a sign of the treasure entrusted to us; for the Devil would not come upon us to tempt us, did he not see us advanced to greater honours.

HILARY. The Devil's snares are chiefly spread for the sanctified, because a victory over the saints is more desired than over others.

AUGUSTINE. (de Trin. iv. 13.) Why did He offer Himself to temptation? That He might be our mediator in vanquishing temptation not by aid only, but by example.

JEROME. Led, not against His will, or as a prisoner, but as by a desire for the conflict.

CHRYSOSTOM. The Devil is wont to be most urgent with temptation, when he sees us solitary; thus it was in the beginning he tempted the woman when he found her without the man, and now too the occasion is offered to the Devil, by the Saviour's being led into the desert.

CHRYSOSTOM. But that you may learn how great a good is fasting, and what a mighty shield against the Devil, and that after baptism you ought to give attention to fasting and not to lusts, therefore Christ fasted, not Himself needing it, but teaching us by His example.

CHRYSOSTOM. But He exceeded not the measure of Moses and Elias, lest it should bring into doubt the reality of His assumption of the flesh.

AUGUSTINE. (Lib. 83. Quest. q. 81.) Otherwise; The sum of all wisdom is to be acquainted with the Creator and the creature. The Creator is the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; the creature is partly invisible,—as the soul to which we assign a threefold nature, (as in the command to love God with the whole heart, mind, and soul,)—partly visible as the body, which we divide into four elements; the hot, the cold, the liquid, the solid. The number ten then, which stands for the whole law of life, taken four times, that is, multiplied by that number which we assign for the body, because by the body the law is obeyed or disobeyed, makes the number forty. All the aliquot parts in this number, viz. 1, 2, 4, 5, 8, 10, 20, taken together make up the number 50. Hence the time of our sorrow and affliction is fixed at forty days; the state of blessed joy which shall be hereafter is figured in the quinquagesimal festival, i. e. the fifty days from Easter to Pentecost.

AUGUSTINE. (Serm. 210. 2.) Not however because Christ fasted immediately after having received baptism, are we to suppose that He established a rule to be observed, that we should fast immediately after His baptism. But when the conflict with the tempter is sore, then we ought to fast, that the body may fulfil its warfare by chastisement, and the soul obtain victory by humiliation.

HILARY. He was an hungred, not during the forty days, but after them. Therefore when the Lord hungred, it was not that the effects of abstinence then first came upon Him, but that His humanity was left to its own strength. For the Devil was to be overcome, not by the God, but by the flesh. By this was figured, that after those forty days which He was to tarry on earth after His passion were accomplished, He should hunger for the salvation of man, at which time He carried back again to God His Father the expected gift, the humanity which He had taken on Him.

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3. And when the Tempter came to Him, he said, If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.

4. But He answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

AMBROSE. (in Luc. c. iv. 3.) He begins with that which had once been the means of his victory, the palate; If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones become loaves. What means such a beginning as this, but that he knew that the Son of God was to come, yet believed not that He was come on account of

His fleshly infirmity. His speech is in part that of an enquirer, in part that of a tempter; he professes to believe Him God, he strives to deceive Him as man.

HILARY. And therefore in the temptation he makes a proposal of such a double kind by which His divinity would be made known by the miracle of the transformation, the weakness of the man deceived by the delight of food.

JEROME. But thou art caught, O Enemy, in a dilemma. If these stones can be made bread at His word, your temptation is vain against one so mighty. If He cannot make them bread, your suspicions that this is the Son of God must be vain.

JEROME. Christ's purpose was to vanquish by humility;

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5. Then the Devil taketh Him up into the holy city, and setteth Him on a pinnacle of the temple,

6. And saith unto Him, If Thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down; for it is written, He shall give His Angels charge concerning Thee: and in their hands they shall bear Thee up, lest at any time Thou dash Thy foot against a stone.

7. Jesus said unto Him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

JEROME. Took him, not because the Lord was weak, but the enemy proud; he imputed to a necessity what the Saviour did willingly.

GLOSS. (ord.) The Devil places us on high places by exalting with pride, that he may dash us to the ground again.

GLOSS. (ord.) Observe here that all these things were done with bodily sense, and by careful comparison of the context it seems probable that the Devil appeared in human form.

JEROME. In the several temptations the single aim of the Devil is to find if He be the Son of God, but he is so answered as at last to depart in doubt; He says, Cast thyself, because the voice of the Devil, which is always calling men downwards, has power to persuade them, but may not compel them to fall.

AMBROSE. But as Satan transfigures himself into an Angel of light, and spreads a snare for the faithful, even from the divine Scriptures, so now he uses its texts, not to instruct but to receive.

JEROME. This verse we read in the ninetieth Psalm (Ps. 91:11.), but that is a prophecy not of Christ, but of some holy man, so the Devil interprets Scripture amiss.

CHRYSOSTOM. Observe that Scripture is brought forward by the Lord only with an apt meaning, but by the Devil irreverently; for that where it is written, He shall give his Angels charge over thee, is not an exhortation to cast Himself headlong.

JEROME. The false Scripture darts of the Devil He brands with the true shield of Scripture.

HILARY. Thus beating down the efforts of the Devil, He professes Himself both God and Lord.

AUGUSTINE. (con. Faust. 22. 36.) It is a part of sound doctrine, that when man has any other means, he should not tempt the Lord his God.

JEROME. It should be noted, that the required texts are taken from the book of Deuteronomy only, that He might shew the sacraments of the second Law.

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8. Again, the Devil taketh Him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth Him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them;

9. And saith unto Him, All these things will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me.

10. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.

11. Then the Devil leaveth Him, and, behold, Angels came and ministered unto Him.

ORIGEN. (in Luc. Hom. 30.) We are not to suppose that when he shewed Him the kingdoms of the world, he presented before Him the kingdom of Persia, for instance, or India; but he shewed his own kingdom, how he reigns in the world, that is, how some are governed by fornication, some by avarice.

GLOSS. (ord.) He saw not, as we see, with the eye of lust, but as a physician looks on disease without receiving any hurt.

JEROME. An arrogant and vain vaunt; for he hath not the power to bestow all kingdoms, since many of the saints have, we know, been made kings by God.

AMBROSE. (in Luc. c. iv. 11.) Ambition has its dangers at home; that it may govern, it is first others' slave; it bows in flattery that it may rule in honour; and while it would be exalted, it is made to stoop.

GLOSS. (non occ.) See the Devil's pride as of old. In the beginning he sought to make himself equal with God, now he seeks to usurp the honours due to God, saying, If thou wilt fall down and worship me. Who then worships the Devil must first fall down.

JEROME. The Devil and Peter are not, as many suppose, condemned to the same sentence. To Peter it is said, Get thee behind me, Satan; i. e. follow thou behind Me who art contrary to My will. But here it is, Go, Satan, and is not added 'behind Me,' that we may understand into the fire prepared for thee and thy angels.

JEROME. When the Devil says to the Saviour, If thou wilt fall down and worship me, he is answered by the contrary declaration, that it more becomes him to worship Jesus as his Lord and God.

AUGUSTINE. (cont. Serm. Arian. 29.) The one Lord our God is the Holy Trinity, to which alone we justly owe the service of piety.

AUGUSTINE. (De Civ. Dei, x. 1.) By service is to be understood the honour due to God; as our version renders the Greek word 'latria,' wherever it occurs in Scripture, by 'service' (servitus), but that service which is due to men (as where the Apostle bids slaves be subject to their masters) is in Greek called 'dulia;' while 'latria,' always, or so often that we say always, is used of that worship which belongs to God.

AUGUSTINE. (De Civ. Dei, ix. 21.) After the temptation the Holy Angels, to be dreaded of all unclean spirits, ministered to the Lord, by which it was made yet more manifest to the dæmons how great was His power.

HILARY. When we have overcome the Devil and bruised his head, we see that Angels' ministry and the offices of heavenly virtues will not be wanting to us.

AUGUSTINE. (De Cons. Ev. ii. 16.) Luke has not given the temptations in the same order as Matthew; so that we do not know whether the pinnacle of the temple, or the ascent of the mountain, was first in the action; but it is of no importance, so long as it is only clear that all of them were truly done.

From Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture:

4:1 Jesus Led into the Wilderness

Readiness to Face Temptations.

Chrysostom: The text says “then.” Then when? This was after the descent of the Spirit, after the voice that was borne from above had said, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Led by whom? This is marvelous. All of this was led by the Holy Spirit. For it says Jesus was “led up by the Spirit.” All this was for our instruction. The Lord does whatever is necessary for our salvation by both acting and being acted upon. He submitted himself to being led up there to wrestle against the devil. Now we should not be troubled if, after our baptism, we too have to endure great temptations. We should not treat this as if unexpected but continue to endure all things nobly, as though it were happening in the natural course of things. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 13.1.

The Devil Defeated by the Same Flesh He Had Made Miserable.

Hilary: The journey into the desert, the forty-day fast, the hunger after the fast, the temptation by Satan and the Lord’s response—all these are full of the effects of the great heavenly counsel. The fact he was led into the desert signifies the freedom of the Holy Spirit to offer his man to the devil and to permit the occasion of temptation and conquest, which the tempter would not have had unless he had been given it. There was in the devil therefore suspicious fear but no knowledge of the true identity of the One suspected. The devil was moved by the forty-day fast. He had knowledge of the poured-out waters of the abyss in just as many days and of the exploration of the promised land, in the Mosaic law written by God. He also knew that this number of years was fulfilled when the people remained in the desert with the life and condition as it were of angels. Apprehensive of that time therefore in tempting him whom he considered to be a man, he acted rashly. He had enticed Adam and by deceiving him led him to death. But it was fitting, because of his wickedness and evil deed, that he be defeated by that same humanity in whose death and misfortunes he gloried. It was the devil who envied God’s gifts to humanity before the temptation of Adam, who was now unable to understand God’s being present in a human being. The Lord was therefore tempted immediately after being baptized. His temptation indicates how sinister are the devil’s attempts especially against those who have been sanctified, for he eagerly desires victory over the saints.

Jesus did not hunger for human food but for human salvation. It was after forty days and not during forty days that he hungered. Moses and Elijah were not hungry during the same period of fasting. Therefore, when the Lord hungered, the work of abstinence did not creep up on him. His strength was not depleted by his forty days of fasting. He did not abandon his nature as a man. The devil was not to be defeated by God but by the flesh, which he surely would not have dared to tempt, except in those things which he recognized were proper human needs because of the pangs of hunger. On Matthew 3.1–2.

4:2 Jesus Fasts for Forty Days and Nights

Forty Days, Then Hunger.

Origen: For the number “forty days” is composed of four groups of ten. This may be akin to the four aspects of physical reality, because the sensible world is formed out of four elements. Or it may be because a human being is formed in forty days in the womb. And so that he might not, by fasting any longer than this, give anyone the notion that he had not taken on flesh in truth, he afterward was hungry, sharing all that we have “except for sin” and participating in our condition through his own suffering. Fragment 61.

Lenten Fasting Anticipated.

Peter Chrysologus: So you see, my friends, the fact that we fast during Lent is not of human invention. The authority is divine and mystical and not taken for granted. Nor is it based on an earthly custom but on heavenly secrets. Lent [Quadragesima] contains the four-sided teaching of four decades of faith, because perfection is always four-sided. The number forty [quadragesimus] and the number ten [denarius], which hold sacraments both in heaven and on earth because a square is not free to open, are used to explain the undertaking of the Lord’s fast. Sermons 11.4.

4:3 The First Temptation

The Devil’s Interrogation.

Chromatius: The devil provokes that he might tempt him, and the Lord follows up that he might win. The battle over this temptation is thus engaged, as the devil says to the Lord, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” Unaware of the mystery of the divine dispensation,

he frames as a question what he does not know. With the voice of a doubter, he interrogates Christ and says, "If you are the Son of God ..." Now let us see why he inquires when he doubts and why he questions when he does not know. He heard that it had been announced by the angel to the Virgin that she would give birth to the Son of God. He saw the magi, who had left behind the error of their limited knowledge, in humble adoration of the Child that was born. He saw, after the baptism, the Holy Spirit descending like a dove. He also heard the Father's voice from heaven saying, "This is my Son." He heard John with a loud voice proclaiming, "This is he who takes away the sin of the world." Disturbed by so much testimony therefore and now troubled by this voice, this is what he feared most of all: that after he had filled the world with sins, he heard there would now come someone to take away the sins of the world. He was frightened indeed by all these utterances, but he did not yet fully believe that the Son of God whom he had heard, whom he now beheld as a man in the flesh, would take away the sins of the world. In a terrible state of fear he seeks to find out whether these things he had heard were true. He sees the Lord fasting "forty days and nights," but he was loath to believe that this was the Son of God. He recalled that both Moses and Elijah also fasted for forty days. And so he asked to be given some sign that this was truly the Son of God. He therefore said, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." Tractate on Matthew 14.2.

The First Point of Attack.

Chrysostom: What does the devil first say? "If you are Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." The focus is not upon hunger but divine Sonship. Thinking to cheat him with supposed compliments, the devil suggested, "If you are Son of God," remaining silent about his hunger in order that he not seem to allege that he indeed was hungry and not upbraiding him for it. For unaware of the greatness of the economy which was unfolding, he supposed hunger to be a reproach to him. So flattering him smoothly, he makes mention of his dignity only.

How then did Christ respond to this? In order to put down the devil's pride and signify that there was nothing shameful in Jesus' hunger nor unbecoming to his wisdom, he brings forward precisely the point that the devil had passed over in silence to flatter him. Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone."

In this way the devil begins his temptation with the necessity of the belly. Mark well the craft of that wicked demon. Note at what precise point he begins his struggling and how well he remembers what he does best. For it was by this same means that he cast out the first man and then encompassed him with

thousands of other evils. Now by the same means here he again weaves his deceit: the temptation to indulge the belly. So too even now one may hear many foolish people say their bad words by thousands because of the belly. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 13.3.

Command These Stones to Become Loaves.

Cyril of Alexandria: Wanting to draw Christ into the passion of vainglory, Satan did not say to him “eat” but “work a miracle.” This he did, not so that Christ would be helped, but, as I said, in order to draw him to a pretentious act. But Christ, knowing this, did not obey him. Later he would not comply with the Pharisees when they wanted to see a sign from him. For they did not approach him with an undoubting heart, as to God, but were tempting him as a man. Let this therefore be an unailing rule for the saints, not to show off before unbelievers upon any pretext of utility. Fragment 32.

4:4 Living by the Word, Not by Bread Alone

The Lesson of the Manna.

Origen: This saying is quoted by our Savior, and it makes clear to a person with understanding that before the manna came, which was our heavenly food, we must have been in a bad way and close to starving, having spent up all our fat for food. For thus it is written: “And you shall remember all the way which the Lord your God has led you in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. And he humbled you and let you hunger and then fed you with manna, which you had not known, nor had your fathers known, in order that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone.” The manna itself is a word. This is made clear from the reply Moses made to the question of the children of Israel, when they said to one another, “What is that?” What then did Moses say? “This is the bread which the Lord has given you to eat. This is the word which the Lord has commanded.” After this the devil goes on to another defeat. Fragment 63.

Feeding on the Word.

Maximus of Turin: The Savior put down the devil’s stratagem with a clever response. He does not do what the devil says, lest he seem to declare the glory of his power at his adversary’s will, nor does he answer that it cannot be done, since he could not deny what he had often already done. Therefore he neither gives in to the devil’s petition nor rejects his inquiry. He reserves for himself the manifestation of his

power and counters his adversary's stratagem with eloquence. He therefore says to him, "Not by bread alone shall man live, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God"—that is, not by earthly bread or by material food, whereby you deceived Adam the first man, but by the word of God, which contains the food of heavenly life. The Word of God is Christ the Lord, as the Evangelist says: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God." So, whoever feeds on the word of Christ does not require earthly food, nor can one who feeds on the bread of the Savior desire the food of the world. The Lord has his own bread; indeed, the bread is the Savior himself, as he taught when he said, "I am the bread who came down from heaven." About this bread the prophet says, "And bread strengthens the human heart." Sermons 51.2.

Not by Bread Alone.

Theodore of Heraclea: The first Adam sinned by eating. Christ prevailed by self-control. He thus teaches that there is no need for us to stay far away from God, even if we are famishing. This is also a pledge of our future state, which Christ in fact inaugurated, that in the future human beings will live even without food. Fragment 22.

Feeding on God's Word.

Jerome: The testimony was taken from Deuteronomy. The Lord responded in this way, for it was his purpose to overcome the devil with humility and not with power. At the same time, it should be noted that unless the Lord had begun to fast, the devil would not have had an occasion, in accordance with the passage: "My son, as you embark upon the service of God, prepare your soul for temptation." But the Savior's very response indicates that it was as man that he was tempted: "Not by bread alone shall man live, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God." So if anyone does not feed upon God's Word, that one will not live. Commentary on Matthew 1.4.4.

4:5–6 The Second Temptation

The Pinnacle of the Temple.

Hilary: The devil works at temptation by leading the Lord from the highest to the lowest things to reduce him to humiliation. He set him on the pinnacle of the temple, as if towering over the laws and the prophets. He knew indeed that the angels would be prompt to minister to the Son of God, lest he dash

his foot against a stone. He could trample underfoot the serpent and the adder and tread on the lion and the dragon. Concerning those lower things which were taken for granted, the devil kept silent, but by mentioning the higher things, he wanted in some way to elicit obedience from the tempted One, hoping to hear an echo of his own glory in a vote of confidence from the Lord of majesty. On Matthew 3.4.

If You Are the Son of God.

Chrysostom: What can the reason be that with each temptation the devil adds, “If you are the Son of God”? He is acting just like he did in the case of Adam, when he disparaged God by saying, “In the day you eat, your eyes will be opened.” So he does in this case, intending thereby to signify that our first parents had been beguiled and outsmarted and had received no benefit. So even in the temptation of Jesus he insinuates the same thing, saying, “In vain God has called you Son and has beguiled you by his gift. For, if this is not so, give us some clear proof that you are from that power.” And, because Christ had reasoned with him from Scripture, he does the same, bringing in the testimony of the prophet. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 13.4.

How the Devil Misinterpreted Scripture.

Jerome: “Throw yourself down.” It is the devil’s voice by which he desires that everyone should fall down. “Throw yourself,” he says. He is able to persuade, but he cannot cast down. “He will give his angels charge concerning you; and upon their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.” This we read in the ninetieth psalm. Clearly the prophecy here is not about Christ but about a holy man. The devil therefore is a poor interpreter of the Scriptures. Certainly, if he really knew what was written about the Savior, he should have also said what follows in the same psalm against him: “You will tread on the lion and the adder, the young lion and the serpent you will trample underfoot.” Concerning the help of the angels, he speaks as though to a feeble man. Concerning his being trampled underfoot, he is silent like an artful dodger.

Jesus said to him, “It is written further, ‘You shall not tempt the Lord your God.’ ” The false arrows from the devil’s own scriptures he breaks with the true shield of the Scripture. And it should be noted that he cited the necessary testimony from Deuteronomy that he might show the sacraments of the second law. Commentary on Matthew 1.4.5–7.

4:7 Not Tempting the Lord

Temptation Overcome by Forbearance.

Chrysostom: What does Christ then do? He is neither indignant nor provoked but with extreme gentleness reasons with him again from the Scriptures, saying, “You shall not tempt the Lord your God,” teaching us that we must overcome the devil not by miracles but by forbearance and long-suffering and that we should do nothing at all for display and vainglory. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 13.4.

4:8 The Third Temptation

4:9 Fall Down and Worship Me

4:10 Serving Only God

The Attempt to Corrupt by Ambition.

Hilary: But now for the third time, the full ambition of diabolical power is at work. The Lord was taken to a very high mountain. All the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them would be his, he was promised, if only he would fall down and worship. His answer broke through all the devil’s suspicions. The devil had enticed Adam with food and led him from the glory of paradise to the place of sin—to the region of the forbidden tree. And he had corrupted him with ambition for a divine name by promising a future similar to that of the gods. In this same way all the power of the world is arrayed against the Lord. The possession of all this is offered to the devil’s very Creator, so that in line with the order of the ancient deceit, he whom the devil did not entice with food nor move from place, he would now corrupt by ambition.

But the Lord’s response put the matter on a higher plane. He said, “Begone, Satan! For it is written, ‘The Lord your God shall you worship, and him only shall you serve.’ ” The devil had to live with the outcome of such great recklessness. His crimes were being discovered. He realized that the Lord his God must be adored in the man. By this effective response, the Lord gave us a decisive example. With human power having been disdained and with worldly ambition being held of little account, we also should remember that our Lord and God alone must be adored, especially when the devil’s honor has become the common business of every age. After this flight of the devil, therefore, the angels ministered to Christ. With the

devil overcome by the man, his head now being crushed, we now can see better the ministering service of the angels and the unfailing courtesies of the heavenly powers toward us. On Matthew 3.5.

The Devil's Offer Reversed.

Jerome: "Then Jesus said to him, 'Begone, Satan! For it is written: the Lord your God shall you worship, and him only shall you serve.'" Satan and the apostle Peter are not condemned by the same judgment, as many may think. For to Peter it was said, "Get behind me, Satan," that is, follow me, you who are contrary to my will. But the devil heard the words "Begone, Satan"; And it was not said to him "Get behind me," as if it were a matter of simple subjection. Rather it is an instruction: "You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve." This is the opposite of the devil's earlier words to the Savior: "If you will fall down and worship me." Now he hears that it is he who should worship his Lord and God. Otherwise, "Go into the everlasting fire that has been prepared for you and your angels." Commentary on Matthew 1.4.10–11.

The Lord Made Sport of the Devil.

Chromatius: David also prefigures this rejection of temptation when he speaks of the Lord, saying, "And the scourge did not approach his tabernacle." No sin of diabolical scourge could come close to the body of the Lord. Therefore the Lord withstood temptations from the enemy that he might restore victory to humankind. He thereby made sport of the devil, according to what David also proclaimed: "That Leviathan, whom you made to sport in it." And again: "He will bring low the false accuser." And also: "You broke the heads of Leviathan in pieces on the water." In the book of Job the Lord declared that this Leviathan would be made sport of and caught in this temptation, saying, "You will draw out Leviathan with a fishhook." Tractate on Matthew 14.5.