

***The Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time  
The Nineteenth Sunday After Pentecost (Latin Mass)  
October 3, 2021  
Year of the Eucharist and Parish (Reflection #38)***

*“The tempter approached saying to him: If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become loaves of bread. He said in reply, ‘It is written: One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.’”  
(Matthew 4:3-4)*

The first temptation of Our Lord Jesus in the wilderness has been the subject of many great and thought-provoking reflections. In my own attempt to add to this vast supply of prayerful thought, I felt it necessary to examine again the statement of the Tempter. Yet this time, I chose to use words similar in meaning; not the exact words used by the gospel writers. My new statement would read: *“If you believe yourself to be Divine or of Divine Origin, then use your divine power to care for a material need.”* By re-examining the Tempter’s statement in this fashion, I no longer felt obligated to view the temptation as something strictly applying to Jesus. Rather, through this approach, I find myself questioning my own understanding of how this statement could be applied to both our Catholic Church and myself.

I would like to first begin by reflecting upon this statement as it could apply to our Catholic Church. To understand my thought, imagine the Tempter appearing before our Catholic Church. He could rightly say: *“Catholic Church, you profess that you are of Divine Origin. You profess that you were established by Jesus Christ. You profess that you are One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic. Because you say you are all of these, then use the influence you possess and the goodwill you have established to take care of the material needs of your children.”* We could, easily therefore, point to the numerous schools, hospitals, orphanages, nursing facilities, charitable organizations, and so very many other works of service members of the Catholic Church have provided for needs of individuals over many, many generations. We could point to all of these and proudly say: *“There Tempter, our philanthropic endeavors prove we are who we say we are.”* Yet, could not the Tempter respond that: *“Although everything stated was completely true, however, all of these good and just charitable material endeavors over generations do not prove we are any more established by Divine Origin than large companies like Microsoft or Budweiser. Do they not also give to help others*

in their need?” And our response would be; well, what would our response be? Is that how we portray ourselves to the world? We are one very large material provider and social influencer seeking to tackle the needs of the world today, providing mankind with a better way of life tomorrow. If this is the case, then we have fallen for the first of the Tempter’s suggestions.

If I pose this same suggestion to myself, then does the same result still play out? The Catholic Church professes a priest to be a man called and ordained by God, Himself. A man, like other men, given a great responsibility to act as His ambassador through the performance of duties which no one could rightly perform without this confirmation. A man who can command God, Himself to come down from the heights of heaven to reside in a wafer of bread upon an altar. Furthermore, to forgive another person their sins, their offenses against God. Literally, to tell God that He must forgive this person because I, a man, say so when I told that person their sins were forgiven. And yet, have I or any other priest become no more than a celibate social worker or the manager of the local Catholic Church franchise? Have I abandoned my vocation as a sacrificial victim for you and is this all you expect of myself or any priest?

To quote a line from Venerable Fulton J. Sheen: “The difference between a sinner and a saint is that one persists in sin, while the other weeps bitterly.” My family, let us weep bitterly if we have allowed our dear Catholic Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, to become nothing more than another organization focusing upon material issues. Let us weep bitterly if we have become satisfied with a priest, including myself, who do not focus on both their and your spiritual growth in the Lord. The Catholic Church, nor I, can offer no true service to God’s people if we take care of the person’s material needs without caring for their eternal wellbeing. We must always seek and demand both — spiritual and material — for ourselves and our children.