

LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION, BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL

[Italicized quotes – Pope Francis – General Audiences on May 1 & 15, 2019]

After beginning with expressions of desire for the fulfillment of God's great plan, the Our Father proceeds to ask for things we need in our daily lives, reaching the high point with: "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (Mt 6:13).

It is with this penultimate invocation that our dialogue with the heavenly Father gets, so to speak, to the heart of the drama: that is, to the matter of the contrast between our freedom and the pitfalls of evil.

Pope Francis observes that the original Greek expression in the Gospels is difficult to render exactly and all the modern translations are somewhat weak. "Lead us not into temptation" seems to imply that God might set hidden pitfalls for us and ensnare us with temptation, testing us to see if we will fall victim to evil. And so we implore him not to do this. But this very notion goes against Jesus' fundamental revelation to us of God as Father. What father would do this?

Temptations are real and inevitable. But we have to exclude the possibility that God is their protagonist. At its very beginning, our prayer reaffirms that God is Father to us, and we know that a father does not lay snares for his children – rather, he protects them from lurking dangers. When evil appears, he fights beside his children to preserve their freedom.

Christians are not dealing with an envious God, in competition with mankind, or who enjoys putting them to the test. These are the images of many pagan divinities. We read in the Letter of the Apostle James: "let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted with evil and he himself tempts no one" (1:13).

Another translation of this invocation is: "let us not fall into temptation." This is more in keeping with the intent of the prayer and in harmony with the rest of this invocation: "but deliver us from evil." Facing temptation, we ask God not only for support, but also for deliverance. Knowing that even Jesus faced temptation, we cannot expect to be totally spared our own experience of it, but we can pray that the Father who supported Jesus will be there for us also. And Jesus shows us that our prayer has already been granted, for in him, "God-with-us" is a promise continually fulfilled.

He is with us when he gives life; he is with us throughout life; he is with us in joy; he is with us in trials; he is with us in sorrow; he is with us in defeat when we sin. But he is always with us, because he is Father and cannot abandon us.

At the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus went into the desert, where he confronted Satan one-on-one. Tempted to achieve power and glory in a devilish manner rather than a divine one, Jesus rejected each of Satan's lures and emerged victorious from his duel with the Enemy: "Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and ministered to him" (Mt 4:11).

As Jesus neared the climax of his ministry, he prayed in Gethsemane, overwhelmed with the realization of his responsibility before God. He faced a crucial trial – not the one before Pilate, but the one of accepting or rejecting the Father's will for him.

The trial is so excruciating that something unexpected happens. Jesus never begs for love for himself, but that night he feels his soul sorrowful, even to death, and so he asks his friends for closeness: "remain here, and watch with me" (Mt 26:38). ... In a time of agony, God asks man not to abandon him, but instead, man falls asleep. But when man faces times of trial, God is watching. In the most awful moments of our life, in the most painful moments, in the most anguishing moments, God watches with us; God fights alongside us; he is always close to us. Why? Because he is Father.

When we face our own temptations and trials, we pray confidently that the Father will not abandon us, will not leave us to face evil without him, but will, indeed, "deliver us from evil." The valley we enter is not desolate but has been crossed by Jesus before us and is blessed by his presence – he is with us always!

A Christian knows how enslaving the power of evil is, and at the same time, experiences how Jesus, who never gave in to its seduction, is on our side and comes to our aid. ... The Lord gives us peace; he gives us forgiveness, but we must ask: "deliver us from evil," in order not to succumb to evil. This is our hope, the strength given to us by the Risen One who is in our midst: he is here. He is here with that strength that he gives us to go forward, and he promises to deliver us from evil.