

Do you watch the Winter Olympics? I was watching a biathlon competition. The athletes must shoot the targets the size of 2 inch diameter 50 meters away in prone position, and the targets 4.5 inches in diameter in standing position. I was just amazed at their ability to control their breath, after having run like rabbits.

There were 60, 70 guys competing for the medals. I noticed that many of the athletes just collapsed after they crossed the finish line. I could tell that these guys really gave all they had, striving for the gold medal. They spread out on the snow and gasped for the air. Every athlete knew, once the 3rd guy came in, there was not any incentive to go for. Yet, those guys kept on coming in and collapsing, after crossing the finish line.

I was thinking, how come no one gave up? Why do they expend the great effort to finish the competition that they knew already lost? I mean, these guys knew that they were going to get

not even a pin or a gift certificate at the Starbucks. Yet the rest of the athletes just drove themselves to the finish line, giving all they had.

Why didn't any one claim fatigue, step aside, and ask for assistance? Why didn't any one ask for a bathroom break, or claim an injury, so that they could retire early from the race, as some pro tennis players do, when the game does not go their way? Why did they stay on, and beat themselves to pulp in the game that had already seen the conclusion?

Was it the sense of honor? Was it the spirit of the Olympics? Or, was it the plain bullheadedness? One could draw one's own conclusions, but one thing I could tell was that there was this tenacity of the human spirit that did not give up, even in the face of the obvious defeat. That human spirit is something that inspires the viewers sitting comfortably in the sofa, watching the TV screen.

If running 15 kilometers in 45 minutes was a great challenge to the human spirit, I was wondering, what was it like to be left in the middle of the desert and stay there for 40 days and 40 nights? We are talking about Jesus, here.

The writer of Luke says that the Holy Spirit *led* Jesus into the wilderness, but the writer of Mark puts a different twist to it. In Mark, the Holy Spirit "drove" Jesus into the wilderness—as if it was against his will. When you think about it, it makes sense: even Bear Grylls of *Man vs. Wild* does it with a full team of support crew; even Les Stroud of *Survivorman* did it for only 7 days at a time. Who would like to go camping in the wilderness with no support crew, no food or water, or proper equipment for 40 days and 40 nights? I highly doubt that Jesus was looking forward to that solo camping trip suddenly thrust upon him.

Somehow, Jesus made it through the 40 days and 40 nights. Regular people like us would be

dying to get back home by that time. Then things got spooky. The devil showed up to say, "Hi." He must have been watching Jesus. He decided to show up on the last day, when he knew Jesus would be at the physically and mentally weakest point, and at the end of the humanly possible endurance. Isn't the devil smart?

Then the devil tested Jesus with two suggestions and one offer. The devil doesn't make you do anything. He merely makes suggestions. The devil began his suggestions with the phrase, "If you are the Son of God." The devil made one offer directly, saying, what Jesus could possess, if he did what the devil asked him to do.

The first test, a suggestion, was the solution which a famished person was looking for: food. The second test was a fantastic deal too good to pass up: I will give you everything in this world, if you worship me. The third test was another suggestion that asked Jesus to verify his standing

with God by jumping off from a high place, just to make sure God is good with his word.

What is implied in these suggestions was the knowledge of what happened at the river Jordan just a while ago. God declared that Jesus was His beloved Son, when Jesus walked out of the water after the baptism. The devil's logic was simple: *since* you are God's beloved—you heard him say with your own ears, didn't you—God is not going to let you get hurt. Don't take my word for it. Go ahead and jump, and behold, how the mighty hand of God keeps you safe.

Jesus repelled these tests with the quotations from the scriptures: Deut. 8:3; 6:13; and 6:16, respectively. It turned out that the devil was a fast learner, and shifted his tactic, when he lost the first test, by making an offer that no one could resist. When that failed, the devil used the same thing Jesus used to defeat him: the devil quoted the

scriptures (Ps. 91:11, 12) to test Jesus.

Did you know that the devil knows his Bible? Do you know your Bible? This is one reason why Christians should study the Bible. The devil studies his Bible in his bed, at his breakfast table, in his bathroom, so that he could get you. We have a seminary-educated devil here, folks. We have to know what is in the Bible, in order to counter the devil's tests!

The devils' tests are exactly what the world values the most: sustenance, wealth and power, and the divine protection. I think the list still has not changed, after all these years. People still struggle for sustenance—livelihood, food, the loaf of bread; still kill one another for wealth and power, at the same time, claiming that God is on their side. Isn't it amazing that the devil knows exactly what people want, and what preoccupies their minds?

Jesus repelled these tests when he was at the most vulnerable point. He repelled them with the Word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. It sounds easy, but in reality, it is extremely difficult to repel such tests as Jesus faced.

There are Christians, and then there are Christians. The fact that people call upon the same God does not necessarily mean that they practice the same religion. One type of Christians practices the religion that professes the belief in the prosperity, wealth, power, success, and God's special favor over others. Guess what the devil would use, in order to mislead these people. I wonder what the devil's success rate is.

The other type of the Christians practices the religion that focuses upon things that are imperishable and unseen. Those things that are seen are mere tools to achieve the purpose that are imperishable and unseen. They know that those visible signs of prosperity, wealth, power, success, and

alleged God's special favor over others are not always what they seem. They know where the devil's power is. They can discern where the devil's weakness is, as well as their own.

The Christian faith journey is an ongoing struggle. It is very similar to the biathlon games that the athletes compete. Even though they know they will not get the gold, silver, or bronze, they nevertheless strive to finish the race. Even though they know there will be no prize or recognition, they give all they have to cross the finish line. They have something that is unseen to the naked eyes; they know something that the TV cameras cannot capture. Committed Christians have that unseen thing in their spirits.

For the devil, it was not over. The devil departed from him until an opportune time. The devil never gives up. The ancient believers put it this way:

Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around

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Luke 4:1-13
"Until An Opportune Time"

like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour (**1 Peter 5:8**).

The devil had his day, when Jesus was crucified. But for the Christians, that was not the end of the story.