

Buried in Tuesday's readings from the Psalms, one hears a verse in Psalm 91 that sounds familiar—but from where? “For he will give his angels charge of you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone”.

It is the second temptation of Jesus Christ by the Devil, according to St Matthew:

Then the devil took him to the holy city, and set him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶ and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, ‘He will give his angels charge of you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’” 7

Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘You shall not tempt the Lord your God.’”

It is good for us to remember that our Lenten season, in part, is a living recollection of Jesus' own 40 days in the wilderness, which immediately followed his Baptism. Great Lent is for us the 40 day journey after the Theophany.

Jesus' sojourn in that wilderness was completely voluntary, ours is mixed.

We are expelled into the desert, since we are expelled from the Garden of Paradise—as we remember on the Sunday of Forgiveness.

In that sense, our sojourn is involuntary—at least since we would *rather not have sinned and been released to the world*.

On the other hand, our sojourn is voluntary, in the sense that we must offer ourselves to this desert dwelling, and gird ourselves up for spiritual battle.

We can choose to enter the Lenten battle, or we can ignore it.

To enter the Arena is an arduous and dangerous feat, though the final battle is already won by Christ.

It is tiring, and perhaps even momentarily debilitating—but there is already Resurrection at the end of the 40 day tunnel.

Contrariwise, to avoid the Arena, or to put a toe in the water (but not the whole self) may seem easy and routine, but it represents the stagnation of sin and death.

The devil is a wily one. He even quotes Scripture word for word—though, as Jesus shows, we must be careful about its use and interpretation. *Of course* God will
give his angels charge over us, and they will bear us up, lest we crash on the rocks.

But most important, as Jesus retorts, it is better not to test God.

And this is the great challenge in life: to walk on the fine line between fully trusting in God—jumping into situations and actions and efforts because they are good and right and true, but taking great care that we have not jumped so far in—one might say, too early, also—that we are tempting God by our zealous faith.