

There's a bully living on my block. He's mean and he's used to getting his way. He's happy when he makes me unhappy. He's very good at being bad. This bully lives on your block, too. He wants to fill your heart with fear and anger. He wants to wind up your life so tight that you're not sure you can cope.

Sometimes this bully visits us at night. He loves to wake us up with a guilty conscience. He loves to keep us awake worrying about — unfinished work, unpaid bills, unresolved issues and uncertain health.

But he also attacks us in broad daylight. To deal with our problems and stress we're mean to our spouse, our kids or co-workers; or we bury ourselves in work and self-pity. To fit in he has us act up in class, hang around the wrong crowd, or do anything naughty that catches the attention of others.

By now you probably know who this bully is. He goes by a number of names: Prince of Darkness / Beelzebub / Satan / Great Dragon / Father of Lies / Devil.

- If you think this bully doesn't exist, think again.
- If you think you can take this bully lightly, think again.
- If you think you can take this bully on all by yourself, rethink that plan.
- If you think you don't stand a chance against this bully, think again. Because today's lesson announces: **“The Bully is Beaten”** loud and clear.

Do you remember when OT Israel was being terrorized by that big bad bully Goliath? He had King Saul and the army of Israel shaking in their boots. Then, one day, out steps a young shepherd named David to take him on. You know how that story ended. **The Bully Was Beaten!**

Same thing happens in today's our lesson. Satan is the big bad bully and he's busy terrorizing human

hearts and lives. Then, one day, out steps a Good Shepherd named Jesus to take him on. Maybe, more like he's lead out by his trainer, the Holy Spirit, into a desert ring to do battle. You know how this story ends, too. **The Bully is Beaten!**

In case it didn't occur to you, that's what this Lenten Season is all about: Jesus battling the Devil ... for you and for your soul. Most Christian churches add an extra day each week to its worship schedule during Lent. This is when we really zero in on the life and death struggle our Savior made for you and me. If you want to give up something for Lent, that's fine. But not these weekly battles between Jesus and your bully Satan.

In today's gospel it's Jesus vs. The Bully in the desert. The bully is licking his chops with conniving and calculated temptations.

Temptation #1: Recall that Jesus hadn't eaten anything for 40 days. In this first temptation the bully targets a weakness, Jesus' hunger: **“If you are the Son of God tell these stones to become bread.”** Besides his hunger, he also trying to get Jesus to doubt the very words his Father told him 40 days earlier, **“You are my Son.”** Doubt, as a temptation, worked well for him on God's first people, Adam and Eve. Now it's God's Son.

Jesus has seen this work on so many. So many had been bullied into thinking he's got the right stuff to satisfy their cravings. Satan is evil, but he's not dumb. He's always in attack mode exploring for your weaknesses and mine. Jesus unleashes the most powerful weapon on the planet to combat this temptation: **It is written, “Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”** **The Bully is Beaten** because Jesus used God's Word.

Temptation #2 is a real doozy. What person doesn't want to feel important and successful? The bully tempts Jesus to show off if he really is who he says he is: **“If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from the top of the temple.”**

“Jump Jesus! Feel good about yourself! Show off your powers while you entertain the people!”

The devil reuses the same old, *“If you are the Son of God”* line, but adds a twist. He introduces into his temptation what Jesus used to combat the bully’s temptation. The devil uses God’s Word, specifically, Psalm 91: **For it is written: “He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”**

But Jesus has seen Satan bully too many into thinking that real happiness and self-worth is found in what others think of them rather than in how much God loves them. He has watched too many test God's love and lose it, rather than trust him and find happiness in his protective arms. He doesn't fall for it, **“It is also written, “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”** Enough said. **The Bully is Beaten!** Another failed attempt.

In Temptation #3, the final one in the gospel, the Devil tries to bully Jesus into taking a shortcut, the easy way out: **“All this I will give you if you will bow down and worship me.”** Jesus, you deserve better. You had heaven. And now, not only are you famished, but you're rejected and ridiculed by your own people and your Father's trying to pin the sins of the whole world on you. It doesn't have to be that hard. Instead of following the will of God and suffering and dying to save the world, just worship me and all this can be yours.

But Jesus has seen the bully destroy plenty of souls this way. Think of Judas at the time of Jesus, or Annanias and Saphira at the time of the Apostles, or many today who would have followed God's will if it wasn't so difficult and demanding.

Jesus wasn't about to be bullied and distracted from his rescue mission for sinners. He'd had enough, **“Away from me, Satan!”** And goes back to that tried and true temptation buster: **“It is written, “Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.”**

The bully tried 3 temptations on Jesus. 3 times **The Bully Was Beaten** by Jesus. It would be hard to

imagine the devil only made these 3 attempts and gave up. These are the 3 recorded.

Since the number 3 seems to be the number of the day, here's 3 lessons you can take home with you today.

1. Jesus' perfect life and his victory over the bully's tricks and temptation ... is your perfect life and your triumph over the bully's tricks and temptation by. And even when you cave in to his tricks, God forgives you because of Jesus.
2. Jesus has first-hand knowledge of what it's like to be bullied by Satan. He can sympathize and understands you may have doubts about him and his Word. The devil tried to put those same doubts in his mind and heart.
3. Jesus gave you a blueprint, a play book, for beating the bully in your life. He used Scripture. That's the life-long value in having children memorize Bible passages. That's the value in being a life-long student of the Bible. Use Jesus' words against the bully ... he can't stand to hear them. Trust Jesus' promises ... they'll never ever fail you.

Maybe, it was after today's gospel story that the loud voice in heaven in Revelation 12 was talking about: **“Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. Therefore, rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them.”**

We're rejoicing too! Because no matter how many times the bully tries to push us around at all hours of the day and night, that won't change this truth: **The Bully is Beaten!**