

Legend of the Grand Inquisitor\* and the Three Temptations of Luke 4:1-13

*1 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, 2 where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry. 3 The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." 4 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone.'" 5 The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. 6 And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. 7 So if you worship me, it will all be yours." 8 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'" 9 The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here. 10 For it is written: "'He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; 11 they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" 12 Jesus answered, "It says: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" 13 When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.*

**It is the year 1478.** He came softly, unobserved, and yet...everyone recognized Him. The people are irresistibly drawn to Him, they surround Him, they flock about Him, follow Him. He moves silently in their midst with a gentle smile of infinite compassion. The sun of love burns in His heart; light and power shine from His eyes; and their radiance, shed on the people, stirs their hearts with responsive love. He holds out His hands to them and blesses them and a healing virtue comes from contact with Him, even with His garments. An old man in the crowd, blind from childhood, cries out, "Lord, heal me and I shall see Thee!" And as it were, scales fall from his eyes and the blind man sees Him. The people weep and kiss the earth under His feet. Children throw flowers before Him, sing, and cry hosanna.

He stops at the steps of the Seville cathedral at the moment when the weeping mourners are bringing in a little open white coffin. In it lies a child of seven, the only daughter of a prominent citizen. The dead child lies hidden in flowers. The crowd shouts to the weeping mother: "He will raise your child."

The priest, coming to meet the coffin, looks perplexed and frowns, but the mother of the dead child throws herself at His feet with a wail. Holding out her hands to the One Who healed the blind man, she cries: "If it is You, raise my child!"

The procession halts, the coffin is laid on the steps at His feet. He looks with compassion, and His lips once more softly pronounce, 'Talitha cumi!' and the maiden arises. The little girl sits up in the coffin and looks round, smiling with wide-open wondering eyes, holding white roses they had put in her hand. (Pause) There are cries, sobs, confusion among the people, and at that moment the cardinal himself, the Grand Inquisitor, passes by the cathedral. He is an old man, almost ninety, tall and erect, with a withered face and sunken eyes, in which there is still a gleam of light. He is not dressed in his gorgeous cardinal's robes, as he was the day before, when he was burning the enemies of the Roman Church - at this moment he is wearing his coarse, old monk's cassock. At a distance behind him come his gloomy assistants and slaves and the 'holy guard.' He stops at the sight of the crowd and watches it from a distance. He sees everything; he sees them set the coffin down at His feet, sees the child rise up, and his face darkens. He knits his thick grey brows and his eyes gleam with a sinister fire. He holds out his finger and bids the guards take Him, the One who raised the child from the dead and gave sight to the blind man. And such is his power, so completely are the people cowed into submission and trembling obedience to him, that the crowd immediately make way for the guards, and in the midst of deathlike silence, they lay hands on Him and lead Him away. The crowd, like one man, instantly bows down to the earth before the old

inquisitor. He blesses the people in silence and passes on. The guards lead their prisoner to the close, gloomy prison in the ancient palace of the Holy Inquisition and shut Him in it. The day passes and is followed by the dark, burning, breathless night of Seville... In the pitch darkness, the iron door of the prison is suddenly opened and the Grand Inquisitor himself comes in with a light in his hand. He is alone; the door is closed at once behind him. He stands in the doorway and for a minute or two gazes into His face. At last he goes up slowly, sets the light on the table and speaks.

Is it You? You? (Pause) Don't answer, be silent. What can You say, indeed? I know too well what You would say. And You have no right to add anything to what You have said of old. Why then, are You come to hinder us? For You have come to hinder us, and You know that. But You know what will be tomorrow? I know not who You are and care not to know whether it is You or only a semblance of Him, but tomorrow I shall condemn You and burn You at the stake as the worst of heretics. And the very people who have today kissed Your feet, tomorrow at the faintest sign from me will rush to heap up the embers of Your fire. Know You that? Yes, maybe You know it.

Have You the right to reveal to us one of the mysteries of that world You have come from?' (Short pause) No, You have not; so You may not add to what has been said of old, and may not take from men the freedom which You exalted when You were on earth. Whatever You might reveal anew will encroach on men's freedom of faith; for it will be manifest as a miracle, and the freedom of their faith was dearer to You than anything in those days fifteen hundred years ago. Did You not often say then, "I will make you free?" But now You have seen these "free" men. Yes, we've paid dearly for it, but at last we have completed that work in Your name.

For fifteen centuries we have been wrestling with Your freedom, but now it is ended and over for good. Do You not believe that it's over for good? You look meekly at me and do not seem even to be angry with me. But let me tell You that now, today, people are more persuaded than ever that they have perfect freedom, yet they have brought their freedom to us and laid it humbly at our feet. But that has been our doing...

The wise and dread spirit, the spirit of self-destruction and non-existence, which talked with You in the wilderness; ...we are told in the books that he "tempted" You. Is that so? And could anything truer be said than what he revealed to You in three questions and what You rejected?... And yet if there has ever been on earth a real and stupendous miracle, it took place on that day, on the day of the three temptations. The statement of those three questions was itself the miracle.... Do You believe that all the wisdom of the earth brought together could have invented anything in depth and force equal to the three questions which were actually put to You then by the wise and mighty spirit in the wilderness? From those questions alone, from the miracle of their statement, we can see that we have to do here not with the fleeting human intelligence but with the absolute and eternal. For in those three questions, the whole subsequent history of humankind is foretold... At the time it could not be so clear, since the future was unknown; but now that fifteen hundred years have passed, we see that everything in those three questions was so rightly divined and foretold and so truly fulfilled that nothing can be added to them or taken from them.

### **First Temptation**

Judge Yourself who was right - You or he who questioned You then. Remember the first question; its meaning, in other words, was this: "You would go into the world, and are going with empty hands, with some promise of freedom that men in their simplicity and their natural unruliness cannot even understand, that they fear and dread - for nothing has ever been more unbearable for humanity than freedom.

But see You these stones in this parched and barren wilderness? Turn them into bread, and humankind will run after You like a flock of sheep, grateful and obedient, though for ever trembling, lest You withdraw Your hand and deny them Your bread. But You would not deprive man of freedom and rejected the offer, thinking, "What is that freedom worth if obedience is bought with bread?" You replied that man lives not by bread alone. But do You know that for the sake of that earthly bread the spirit of the earth will rise up against You and will strive with You and overcome You, and all will follow him, crying, "Who can compare with this beast? He has given us fire from heaven!"

Do You know that the ages will pass, and humanity will proclaim by the lips of their sages that there is no crime, and therefore no sin; there is only hunger? "Feed men, and then ask of them virtue!" That's what they'll write on the banner they will raise against You, with which they will destroy Your temple. ... And we alone shall feed them in Your name, declaring falsely that it is in Your name. Oh, never, never can they feed themselves without us! No science will give them bread so long as they remain free. In the end they will lay their freedom at our feet and say to us, "Make us your slaves, but feed us." ... They will be convinced, too, that they can never be free, for they are weak, vicious, worthless, and rebellious.

You promised them the bread of Heaven, but I repeat again, can it compare with earthly bread in the eyes of the weak, ever sinful and ever ignoble race of man? And if for the sake of the bread of Heaven thousands and tens of thousands will follow You, what is to become of the millions and tens of thousands of millions of creatures who will not have the strength to forego the earthly bread for the sake of the heavenly? Or do You care only for the tens of thousands of the great and strong while the millions, numerous as the sands of the sea, who are weak but love You must exist only for the sake of the great and strong? No, we care for the weak too. They are sinful and rebellious, but in the end they too will become obedient. They will marvel at us and look on us as godly because we are ready to endure freedom and rule over them - so awful will freedom seem to them.

But we shall tell them that we are Your servants and rule them in Your name. We shall deceive them again, for we will not let You come near us again. That deception will be our suffering, for we shall be forced to lie. This is the significance of the first question in the wilderness, and this is what You rejected for the sake of that freedom which You exalted above everything. Yet in this question lies hidden the great secret of this world. If You'd chosen "bread" that day, You would have satisfied the universal and everlasting craving of humanity - to find someone to worship. So long as man remains free, he strives for nothing so incessantly and so painfully as to find someone to worship...

For the sake of common worship, they've slain each other with the sword. They have set up gods and challenged one another, "Put away your gods and come and worship ours, or we will kill you and your gods!" And so it will be to the end of the world, even when gods disappear from the earth; they will fall down before idols just the same. You knew; You could not help knowing, this fundamental secret of human nature, but You rejected the one infallible banner which was offered You to make all men bow down to You alone - ...earthly bread; and You rejected it for the sake of freedom and the bread of Heaven. Behold what You did further. And all again in the name of freedom! I tell You that man is tormented by no greater anxiety than to find someone quickly to whom he can hand over that gift of freedom with which the ill-fated creature is born. But only the one who can appease their conscience can take over their freedom. In bread there was offered You an invincible banner; give bread, and man will worship You, for nothing is more certain than bread. But if someone else gains possession of his conscience - oh! then he will cast away Your bread and follow after the one who has ensnared his conscience. In that You were right. For the secret of man's being is not only to live but to have something

to live for. Without a clear conception of the object of life, man would not consent to go on living and would rather destroy himself than remain on earth, though he had bread in abundance. That is true. But what happened? Instead of taking men's freedom from them, You made it greater than ever!

Did You forget that man prefers peace and even death to freedom of choice in the knowledge of good and evil?... You chose what was utterly beyond the strength of men, acting as though You did not love them at all - You who came to give Your life for them! Instead of taking possession of men's freedom, You increased it, and burdened the spiritual kingdom of humankind with its sufferings forever. You desired man's free love so that he should follow You freely, enticed and taken captive by You. In place of the rigid, ancient law, man must hereafter with free heart decide for himself what is good and what is evil, having only Your image before him as his guide. But did You not know he would at last reject even Your image and Your truth if he is weighed down with the fearful burden of free choice? ...

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Teemption

So that, in truth, You Yourself laid the foundation for the destruction of Your kingdom, and no one is more to blame for it. Yet what was offered You? There are three powers, three powers alone, able to conquer and hold captive forever the conscience of these impotent rebels for their own happiness - those forces are miracle, mystery, and authority. You have rejected all three and have set the example for doing so. When the wise and dread spirit set You on the pinnacle of the temple and said to You, "If You would know whether You are the Son of God, then cast Yourself down, for it is written: the angels shall hold him up lest he fall and bruise himself, and You shall know then whether You are the Son of God and shall prove then how great is Your faith in Your Father. But You refused and would not cast Yourself down. Oh! of course, You did proudly and well, like God; but the weak, unruly race of men, are they gods? Oh, You knew then that in taking one step, in making one movement to cast Yourself down, You would be tempting God and have lost all Your faith in Him, and would have been dashed to pieces against that earth which You came to save. And the wise dread spirit that tempted You would have rejoiced.

But I ask again, are there many like You? And could You believe for one moment that men too could face such a temptation? Is the nature of men such that they can reject miracles and at the great moments of their life, the moments of their deepest, most agonizing spiritual difficulties, cling only to the free verdict of the heart? ... But You did not know that when man rejects miracles, he rejects God too; for man seeks not so much God as the miraculous. ...

You did not come down from the Cross when they shouted to You, mocking and reviling You, "Come down from the cross and we will believe that You are He." You did not come down, for again You would not enslave man by a miracle ... You craved love freely given and not the base raptures of the slave before the might that has overawed him forever. But You thought too highly of men therein, for they are slaves: of course, though rebellious by nature. Look round and judge: fifteen centuries have passed; look upon them. Whom have you raised up to Yourself? ... Man is weaker and baser by nature than You have believed him! Can he, can he do what You did? By showing him so much respect, You did, as it were, cease to feel for him for You asked far too much from him - You who have loved him more than Yourself! ... Isn't humankind everywhere now rebelling against our power, and proud of his rebellion? ...

But their childish delight will end and it will cost them dearly. They will cast down temples and drench the earth with blood. But they will see at last, the foolish children, that though they are rebels, they are impotent rebels, unable to keep up their own rebellion. Bathed in their foolish tears, they will recognize at last that He who created them rebels must have meant to mock at them. They will say this

in despair, and their utterance will be a blasphemy that will make them more unhappy still, for man's nature cannot bear blasphemy, and in the end always avenges it on itself. And so unrest, confusion, and unhappiness - that is the present lot of man after You bore so much for their freedom!

Your great prophet tells in vision and in image that he saw all those who took part in the first resurrection and that there were of each tribe twelve thousand. But if there were so many of them, they must have been gods, not men. They had borne Your cross, they had endured scores of years in the barren, hungry wilderness, living upon locusts and roots - and You can indeed point with pride at those children of freedom, of love freely given, of free and splendid sacrifice for Your name. But remember that they were only some thousands - and what of the rest? And how are the other weak ones to blame because they could not endure what the strong have endured? ... We too have a right to preach a mystery and to teach them that it's not the free judgment of their hearts, not love that matters, but a mystery that they must follow blindly, even against their conscience. So we have done.

We have corrected Your work and have founded it upon miracle, mystery and authority. And men rejoiced that they were again led like sheep and that the terrible gift that had brought them such suffering was at last lifted from their hearts...

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Temptation

Why have You come now to hinder us? And why do You look silently and searchingly at me with Your mild eyes? Be angry. I don't want Your love, for I love You not. And what use is it for me to hide anything from You? Don't I know to Whom I am speaking? All that I can say is known to You already. And is it for me to conceal from You our mystery? Perhaps it is Your will to hear it from my lips. Listen, then. We are not working with You but with him - that is our mystery. It's long - eight centuries - since we have been on his side and not on Yours. Just eight centuries ago, we took from him what You rejected with scorn, that last gift he offered You, showing You all the kingdoms of the earth. We took from him Rome and the sword of Caesar, and proclaimed ourselves sole rulers of the earth, though to date we have not been able to complete our work. But whose fault is that?

Oh, the work is only beginning, but it has begun. It has long to await completion and the earth has yet much to suffer, but we shall triumph and shall be Caesars, and then we shall plan the universal happiness of humanity. But You might even then have taken the sword of Caesar. Why did You reject that last gift? Had You accepted that last counsel of the mighty spirit, You would have accomplished all that man seeks on earth - that is, some one to worship, some one to keep his conscience, and some means of uniting all ... For the craving for universal unity is the third and last anguish of men. Mankind as a whole has always striven to organize a universal state. ... The great conquerors... whirled like hurricanes over the face of the earth striving to subdue its people, and they too were but the unconscious expression of the same craving for universal unity. Had You taken the world and Caesar's purple, You would have founded the universal state and have given universal peace. For who can rule men if not he who holds their conscience and their bread in his hands? We have taken the sword of Caesar, and in taking it we of course have rejected You and followed him...

You are proud of Your elect, but You have only the elect, while we give rest to all. ... With us, all will be happy and will rebel no more nor destroy one another as under Your freedom.

Oh, we shall persuade them that they will only become free when they renounce their freedom to us and submit to us. And shall we be right or shall we be lying? They will be convinced that we are right, for they will remember the horrors of slavery and confusion to which Your freedom brought them. Freedom, free thought, and science will lead them into such straits and will bring them face to face with such marvels and insoluble mysteries that some of them, the fierce and rebellious, will destroy

themselves; others, rebellious but weak, will destroy one another; while the rest, weak and unhappy, will crawl ... to our feet and whine to us: "Yes, you were right, you alone possess His mystery, and we come back to you - save us from ourselves!"

... Too, too well they know the value of complete submission! And until men know that, they will be unhappy. Who is most to blame for their not knowing it? Speak! ... We shall give them the quiet, humble happiness of weak creatures such as they are by nature. Oh, we shall persuade them at last not to be proud, for You lifted them up and thereby taught them to be proud. We shall show them that they are weak, that they are only pitiful children, but that childlike happiness is the sweetest of all. They will become timid and will look to us and huddle close to us in fear, as chicks to the hen. They will marvel at us and will be awe-stricken before us and will be proud at our being so powerful and clever that we have been able to subdue such a turbulent flock of thousands of millions. ...

Oh, we shall allow them even sin - they are weak and helpless - and they will love us like children because we allow them to sin. We shall tell them that every sin will be forgiven if it is done with our permission, that we allow them to sin because we love them, and that the punishment for these sins we take upon ourselves. And we shall take it upon ourselves, and they will adore us as their saviors who have taken on themselves their sins before God. And they will have no secrets from us. ... And they will be glad to believe our answer, for it will save them from the great anxiety and terrible agony they endure at present in making a free decision for themselves. And all will be happy- all the millions of creatures except the hundred thousand who rule over them. For only we, we who guard the mystery, shall be unhappy. ...

It is prophesied that You will come again in victory, You will come with Your chosen, the proud and strong, but we will say that they have only saved themselves, whereas we have saved all. ... Then I will stand up and point out to You the thousand millions of happy children who have known no sin. And we who have taken their sins upon us for their happiness will stand up before You and say: "Judge us if You can and dare." Know that I fear You not... But I awakened and would not serve madness. I turned back and joined the ranks of those who have corrected Your work. I left the proud and went back to the humble for the happiness of the humble. What I say to You will come to pass, and our dominion will be built up. I repeat, tomorrow You shall see that obedient flock who at a sign from me will hasten to heap up the hot cinders about the pile on which I shall burn You for coming to hinder us. For if anyone has ever deserved our fires, it is You. ... I have spoken.'

When the Inquisitor ceased speaking, he waited some time for his Prisoner to answer him; His silence weighed down upon him. He saw that the Prisoner had listened intently all the time, looking gently in his face and evidently not wishing to reply. The old man longed for Him to say something, however bitter and terrible. But He suddenly approached the old man in silence and softly kissed him. That was all his answer. The old man shuddered. His lips moved. He went to the door and opened it and said, "Go, and come no more - come not at all, never, never!"

And he let Him out into the dark alleys of the town. The Prisoner went away." What happened to the old man?" you ask. The kiss glows in his heart, but the old man adheres to his idea.

The Spirit intercedes for us and for him with sounds too deep for word to express. And we praise God's Name knowing that in praise, there is joy, healing, and life. This monologue is about our Gospel, Christ's temptations, which are also the temptations of those who rule or wish to. Amen

(>Brothers Karamzoff, Dostoevsky)