

- In June 1794, the entire Carmelite Community of Compiègne, France, was arrested during the French Revolution's Reign of Terror for refusing to allow the Revolutionary government to suppress their community.
- The revolutionary government, in the name of the Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, closed monasteries and convents, abolished religious vows, and clergy were forced to swear an oath to the state. Monks and nuns were told to return to normal private life, and many did.
- But the Carmelites of Compiègne refused to cease being nuns, which led to their arrest. A month after their arrest, the Carmelites were transferred to Paris, where on July 17<sup>th</sup>, 1794, they were executed for treason by guillotine.
- While still in prison, knowing that they were going to die, these valiant women offered themselves as victims to God for the restoration of peace in France and in the Church.
- On the day of their execution, as the community approached the guillotine, they jointly renewed their religious vows and began chanting the *Veni Creator Spiritus*, which is often chanted at the liturgies for the profession of vows and ordinations.
- Amazingly courageous, each of these brave Carmelites continued chanting right up until the moment her head was severed from her saintly body – until at last, the solitary voice of the prioress, Mother Teresa of St. Augustine, was silenced by that heartless and cruel blade.
- Of course, our Lord accepted the sacrifice of these valiant women, and the bloody Reign of Terror ended just days after their martyrdom – saving the lives of countless others who would have met the same fate for rejecting the terrible tyranny of the French Revolution.
- Interestingly, the story of the Carmelite Martyrs of Compiègne has inspired a brief novel, a motion picture, a television movie, and an opera called: *Dialogues of the Carmelites*.
- Perhaps what people find so compelling about this story is the way these nuns confronted the evil in their midst: courageously, and with unshakeable faith in God's power and goodness.
- The fact that they sang on the way to the guillotine is a good sign that God strengthened them as they faced this evil.
- Ever since the fall in the Garden so long ago, evil has been a regular part of man's existence. Whether we like to think about it or not, the devil is real and very well-employed. He and his demons are purely malicious beings who want nothing more than to lead us to damnation.
- While some people do face extraordinary levels of evil through phenomena like demonic oppression, obsession, and even full-on possession, most of us face only ordinary forms of demonic interference in our lives, mostly in the form of temptation.
- While not all temptation to sin is demonic in origin, sometimes it is. Sometimes, a demon does tempt us to sin, inflaming our imagination with the idea of the pleasure to be enjoyed from committing a sin. Our Lord did not exempt Himself from this.
- As we begin our "campaign of Christian service," which is how the opening prayer from Ash Wednesday refers to Lent, we are presented with the story of our Lord's temptation in the desert as an inspiration and an example to follow.
- Of this fascinating Gospel story, St. Augustine tells us that Jesus submitted to the devil's temptations so as to be one with us in our human condition.
- In this way our blessed Lord has shown not only His love and solicitude for us sinful men, but He has shown us the means for overcoming the evil in our lives.

- On a surface level we see our Lord combatting satan’s temptations by quoting Scripture, and certainly the Word of God is *living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword*, as the author of the Letter to the Hebrews attests (cf. Heb 4:12).
- Because of this, we should meditate regularly on Scripture so that we, too, can call upon certain verses to help us fend off the temptations from the evil one.
- But on a deeper level, we need to see in this Gospel story how we are united with Christ, Who wins the victory for us over temptation and sin.
- As St. Augustine wrote:

*In Christ you were tempted, for Christ received His flesh from your nature, but by His own power gained salvation for you; He suffered death in your nature, but by His own power gained life for you; He suffered insults in your nature, but by His own power gained glory for you; therefore, He suffered temptation in your nature, but by His own power gained victory for you.*

- The holy and penitential season of Lent is certainly a time for us to face our “demons” – whatever they may be – and to do so for the purpose of becoming more like Christ.
- What St. Augustine is telling us is that Christ is with us in all that we suffer in life, even temptation. But he also tells us that we don’t win out over evil by our own power. It’s by Christ’s power that we are victorious. St. Augustine continues:

*If in Christ we have been tempted, in Him we overcome the devil. Do you think only of Christ’s temptations and fail to think of His victory? See yourself as tempted in Him, and see yourself as victorious in Him. He could have kept the devil from Himself; but if He were not tempted He could not teach you how to triumph over temptation.*

- So, my friends, as we dive into this Lenten season, let us be faithful like the Carmelite martyrs of Compiègne in facing the evil in our lives, however it may manifest itself.
- As we are tempted toward our usual faults, failings, and sins, let us call upon the Lord to save us. When St. Peter walked on water and then began to sink, he called out: “Jesus, save me.” And Christ pulled him out of the turbulent waters. And He will do the same for us!
- When troubles and temptations raise their ugly heads, may we be mindful in asking God for the grace to overcome, confident that His grace is always sufficient.
- Rather than relying upon our own meager willpower, let us call down the power of Christ!
- Remember: Christ Jesus is one with us in our temptations, and just as He did with the Israelites in Egypt in the days of Moses, our Lord hears our cries for deliverance and will lead us safely to His promised land if we place our hopes in Him.
- As we see ourselves tempted in Christ, may we find ourselves victorious in Him indeed.
- Carmelite Martyrs of Compiègne, pray for us. St. Augustine, pray for us.