

I LENT 2015
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Temptation...the desire to perform an action we may immediately enjoy...and probably later regret for various reasons. Temptation...to eat that chocolate éclair at coffee hour. Temptation...to sin...to go against God's will...to break the ideal relationship we have with God. Temptation...to coax, entice or manipulate another person into doing the same.

The Gospel tells us immediately after he was baptized the Holy Spirit led Jesus off by himself into the desert...to be tempted. Jesus is made of the same stuff the Father is made of...Godhood. He cannot be tempted. In fact...he was tempted...and he passed the test with flying colors.

Why was Jesus tempted...tested? It was to prove his humanity and show us the way to fight against Satan and our own temptations to seek instant gratification of the unhealthy and ultimately destructive kind. Jesus...the writer of Hebrews reminds us...has been tested in every way we are tested. He understands our strengths and weaknesses better than we understand ourselves.

Satan challenged Jesus to act against his own nature and against God. We know Satan by many names...accuser...deceiver...adversary. He is the biggest liar of all...promising what he can't deliver. He is Beelzebub...Lord of the Flies...whose kingdom is death. He was also delusional in thinking he could trick Jesus and get him to fail the test.

Jesus faced three very real tests. In each test the Devil asked Jesus to do something to prove he was God's Son...to perform a magic trick to prove himself to the Devil's satisfaction. Jesus was not about to play into the Devil's hands.

We all experience hunger and it is a need that must be satisfied if we are to survive. Jesus was without a doubt hungry after spending a long time in the desert without much food. The Devil told him to turn stones into bread...Jesus could have done that...satisfying his hunger would have been good...giving into the Devil would not have been good. Jesus quoted a passage from Deuteronomy...bread is OK...God's word is better.

The Devil knows Scripture too...so he tries to get Jesus to jump from the highest point of the Temple in Jerusalem...further tempting Jesus by quoting Psalm 91 about angels coming to his aide so he won't get hurt. Jesus replied...again citing Deuteronomy...testing God is a waste of time!

Perhaps the Devil thought one more test would do the trick. Take Jesus to a high mountain and offer him the world. All Jesus had to do was fall down and worship him. Jesus told the Devil to get lost.

The time Jesus spent in the desert was his own Lent...the time he confronted all the temptations that have ever afflicted humanity. Saint Paul tells us in his First Letter to the Corinthians we should expect to be tested...not beyond our ability to withstand the test...and with the test there will always be a way out.

The Devil seized the moment he thought Jesus was the most vulnerable to try to trick him. He tries to do the same with us. He tries to trick us into thinking there is no way out...the Devil is a dangerous adversary and very good at playing the game of lies and deception...he preys on our weakness...our self-pity...our sense of failure.

Dutch-born Roman Catholic priest, Father Henri Nouwen, wrote, "There is an awareness of sin that does not lead us to God but to self-preoccupation...temptation...to be so impressed by our sins and failings...we get stuck in a paralyzing guilt...instead of directing our eyes toward God. It is the guilt that has become an idol and therefore a form of pride."

Lent is our spiritual journey through the desert along with Jesus...we confront our own temptations and tests and the guilt that comes along with knowing we sometimes act against God's will...the times we hurt have hurt ourselves and others. We need to make certain we don't get stuck in the desert. Jesus is our way out of temptation and testing.

Temptation...the chocolate éclair at coffee hour...go ahead and indulge...even the Sundays in Lent are feast days. Temptation...to sin...to break the special relationship we have with God...not on the table. It's time to tell the Devil to get lost.

