

I Lent 2023
Sermon-Saint Joseph Parish
Father Craig Looney
St. Matthew 4.1-11



Temptation...the word has come to mean something bad today. Even among Christians...we use the word in the wrong way. Temptation is not itself sinful...how we respond to the temptation might be.

Saint Paul makes it clear in his First Letter to the Corinthians we can expect to be tempted (some modern translations of the Bible prefer the word *tested*). Paul goes on to say any kind of test we endure is common to everyone else on Planet Earth.

Many of us take on spiritual disciplines during Lent. We may give up the before-dinner cocktail...or the after-dinner ice cream and cake. We may cut back on the amount of food we eat each day. We may spend extra time each day in prayer. What we are trying to do is experience as best we can what Jesus experienced on his journey to the cross.

If we forget and have that cocktail or ice cream and cake during our own Lenten journey...that's not a sin. We have, however, missed opportunities for spiritual growth. If we get so busy during the day we forget to pray...we need to try harder tomorrow. We can start our recovery of our Lenten discipline with the perfect prayer...the Lord's Prayer.

The Gospel tells us after Jesus was baptized...the Holy Spirit led him out into the desert to be tested by Satan. Jesus submitted to temptation to give us an example of how we can resist Satan and not give into temptations that lead us away from God. After fasting for 40 days...Jesus was hungry.

Hunger is a need that has to be satisfied if we are to survive. Sometimes we eat too much or drink too much...giving into the temptation to overindulge. Eating and drinking too much can harm our bodies...and have a negative affect on our health. That could be considered sinful...not taking care of the bodies God has given us.

Satan tried to get Jesus to act against his own nature and God. Satan is the accuser...the deceiver...the adversary...the liar...the Lord of the Flies. He brings death...not life...he knows he has already lost the war...he will lose this battle against Jesus.

First...Satan challenges Jesus to turn stones into bread. Jesus quotes Deuteronomy...bread is OK...God's word is better. The Devil knows Scripture too...so he then tries to get Jesus to jump from the highest point of the Temple in Jerusalem. He quotes Psalm 91...angels will come to help Jesus so he won't get hurt. Jesus again cites Deuteronomy...testing God is a waste of time! Finally Satan presents the ultimate challenge...the ultimate temptation. He wants Jesus to fall down and worship him. Jesus tells the Devil to get lost!

The Devil seized the moment he thought Jesus was the most vulnerable to try to trick him. He does the same with us. We are at our most vulnerable during our own Lenten journey to the cross. Satan places obstacles in our way. He preys on our weaknesses...our self-pity...our sense of failure...the guilt that takes over our lives. Worse yet...he tempts us into thinking God has given up on us...so why shouldn't we give up too?

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.”

In the Epistle Paul tells us not to give up. He encourages us to patiently endure the troubles, hardships and difficulties we encounter on our road back to God. Paul is a good example for us to follow. He had a lifetime of temptations come his way...he never gave up.

Now about the temptation to eat all those treats at coffee hour...we can go ahead and indulge. All Sundays are mini celebrations of Easter and are not fast days.

Temptation...Paul tells us we can expect to get tested. We can expect to get tested in the same way every other human being gets tested. And we need to pay attention to something else Paul tells us...God will not let us get tested beyond our power to remain firm in our faith...he will provide us with a way out. We just have to look for it.

