

1st Sunday in Lent Year A

Temptations: what are they? They are a desire to something that is evil. No one is said to be tempted to good, that we must choose. Often in the world we try to down play the word by making it more friendly, like naming a chocolate after it. Or by saying something is so delightful it is sinful. Let us not be fooled by the world. The so-called tame dragons - temptation and sin - are death to us. Oscar Wilde once said of temptation that the only way to overcome temptation is to give into it. It looks like Adam and Eve thought that as well.

What is one to do with temptations? Will we ever be free of them? The answer is yes, once we are dead our temptations will go away. Until then we are in a fierce contest. The good news is that a thousand temptations do not make one sin and no matter what we are inclined to do it is not a sin to be inclined to do something, even the most horrific thing. It is not a sin until we give into the inclination. We are all in the same battle with disordered inclinations, each of has them, some are more socially acceptable than others, but giving in to any disordered inclination will lead to the peril of our salvation. One fascinating and helpful thing is that if you and I pull back the layers of our inclinations, we will find unmet needs. So, in a sense, Oscar Wilde was right that we need to give in to and not merely fight them. But when we as Christians say 'give in' we mean that we must find the good desire in our soul that is unmet and bring that to God. We must always start with what or why we are here in order to face and profit from temptation. It is not about running away but really running to something and the temptation merely gets in the way. Because the truth of the matter is temptations are obstacles and are not meant to make us trip. Think of the hurdle: by learning to jump over it, you become stronger. If you don't know how to jump over it, you trip and fall. Temptation is like that - God is the coach who teaches us to jump.

Many temptations that we have can be really scary and humiliating in their disordered desires. But we will never beat them by running from them, the way is through them. Of course we are not talking about the temptation itself. If you have a temptation to drink too much 'through it' does not mean go through the liquor store. Through it means asking what you are really desiring. Like if we are tempted to sin with another person, through it doesn't mean spending time with that person, that could be what we call an occasion of sin, which we are called to avoid. Through it means that we process what we are desiring and how to find that desire in God. God is the source of all desires and in Him is the fulfillment of all desires. However, through our friends Adam and Eve, we now can have our desires twisted. That means not ordered to our good, namely Heaven. It is in our friendship with God that our desires gets reordered and healthy again. But there will always be an infection of selfishness that we will have to complete with. One person was telling me about malaria. The person said it is treatable but make sure you take the whole dose because a partly killed disease will mutate into one that can overcome the medicine. So it is the same way for us and sin. We must swallow the medicine, and take it often, so as to root out the vice of selfish love in our lives. Similar to many medicines, the more we accept its healing properties the greater affect it has. For example, if we come here Sunday after Sunday and we are not noticing a change in our selfish nature and are still falling to the same sins, we need to change how we are receiving the medicine. Because the medicine from God works when we ask it to work, when we want to change and target it in the right place. We target it in the right place by letting God direct it.

Our temptations are basically around trust in God. Do we trust God to meet our needs or will we be tempted to let sin fulfill them? The example of the First and Gospel readings give us good examples of how to combat temptation. Eve did not relate her temptation back to God. She trusted in herself to

come up with the answer and solution, as did Adam. We see a difference when Jesus faces temptation. He does not look to himself to give the answer. He answers from Scripture, continuing to bring the temptations back to God. This is our way through them as well, to bring them to God. Ask: *God, what does this mean? What unmet desire is being presented?* It also seemed that Eve spent more time talking to the serpent than to God. Only in our relationship with God will we be able to recognize the temptations. If we are only in contact with the world many times we will not know we have bitten into forbidden fruit until it is too late. All temptations are the question: Can you trust God? It is wise for us to make daily acts of faith and ask God for the grace to trust Him and lead us through the danger. We are also blessed to see Jesus himself was tempted and did not sin and so He can lead us through our temptations and, like Jesus, the angels will minister to us satisfying our desires.