

A young couple was having a hard time making ends meet. One day the wife came home from shopping with a dress that cost over \$200...The husband got very upset. "How could you do this?"...She said to him, "I was outside the store looking at the dress in the window, & then I found myself trying it on....It was like Satan was whispering in my ear, 'You look fabulous in that dress. Buy it!'... Then, the husband replied, "You know how I deal with that kind of temptation...I would tell him, 'Get behind me, Satan!'"..."Well, I did tell him," she replied," but then he said, 'Oh, that dress looks even more fabulous from back here!'"...Ah, the devil made her do it.

Temptation...We just heard Luke's account of Jesus being tempted by the devil,...This scene takes place right after Jesus had been baptized by John,... anointed by the Holy Spirit & heard the voice of God proclaiming, "You are my beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased."... With those words still echoing in His ears, Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the desert to fast & to pray & to prepare for the mission His Father had given Him...It is there that Jesus – starving & exhausted - was tempted by Satan to reject God's plan & to take the easy path to glory.... Jesus knew that the mission He was given would be a hard one, .. with its rejections, betrayals,& suffering...But, He said NO to Satan,.. NO to taking the easy way...If He was going to save the world, it would be God's way, even if it led to the cross. ...Jesus refused to be less than who He was – the Son of God

Now, is there any connection between what Jesus experienced in the desert & what goes on in our lives ? ...Have any of us ever gone 40 days without eating?...I have trouble going 40 minutes. ...And what about that strange assortment of temptations Jesus faced?...Are they anything like the ordinary temps we face every day?... So, then, how does this Gospel connect with our lives?...Well, I think we can see in Jesus's spiritual battle with Satan, the same spiritual battle each of us face every day: the temptation to be less than who God created us to be...The temptation to take the easy way, & not God's way.

Here's the thing...We have been baptized into Christ...We belong to God,...We are children of God... Unlike Jesus, though,...we often forget who we are & to whom we belong,.. & that's when we fall into the temptation to be less than the child of God that we are....We do things we know are wrong. ..We know they're sins,.. but we still do them.,,.. We're kinda stupid that way. I know I am.

We know the 10 Commandments...We've heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ proclaimed & preached over & over. ...We know how God wants us to live...Yet there are times when even though we know what we're doing is wrong,.. we know it's the opposite of what God wants of us,...we know we're going to regret it,... we still give in to temptation. We sin.....Why?...Why? Because temptation always makes a bad thing look good...Doesn't it? ...Satan is a master at making us believe that IF WE DO IT, we'll be happier – we'll feel better – than if we didn't do it... And that's how it's been since Adam & Eve in the Garden...Of course, they found out what we find out when we fall to temptation:... **IT'LL ALMOST ALWAYS END UP BAD**...Oh, it might make us happier for a while, might bring us pleasure for a while, but eventually, eventually it will bite us in the butt,...often with serious consequences: ...guilt, shame, pain & suffering, damaged relationships, or worse.

Right about now, if my preaching professor – Fr. Bob Kennedy - were here, he'd be yelling: "Enough about temptation & sin... You're supposed to preach the Good News.,,Where's the Good News here?"... So, Ok, here's the Good News.**The 1st Good News:**... being tempted is **not** a sin....There's always going to be temptations we can't avoid. ...The 1st Letter of Peter warns us: "*Be sober & vigilant...The devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.*" .. Satan is always on the prowl, ..looking for victims....But being tempted is not a sin. **Giving in** to the temptation,...that's a sin.

The 2nd Good News is that when we do surrender to a temptation - & we will - it isn't going to make God love us any less. ..We only need to look at Jesus on the cross to reassure us of that...There are no conditions on God's love for us...no matter how low we sink...It's like this...Here is a \$100 bill. Who of you would take it if I offered it?...Now, here it is all crumpled up...Do you still want it?...And if I put it on the ground & grind it into the dirt with my shoe, would you still want it?...No matter what I do to the bill, you still want it because it's still worth \$100..There are times in our lives when we will be crumpled up, and ground into the dirt by the bad choices we make,... & we may feel we are worthless.

But, dirty or clean, crumpled or smooth, we never lose our value to God; we are still priceless to the One who loves us so much that He gives us chance after chance....When we fall, God gives us the chance to get up & ask for forgiveness, promise to repent & start over again.

The 3rd Good News is that when a temptation becomes too much to handle, we don't have to handle it alone... St. Paul promises in 1 Cor: "*God is faithful, & He will not let you be tempted beyond your strength...He will provide you with the way to escape & to endure it.*"....When we are faced with temptations, Jesus will help us conquer them,...if we turn to Him..With His help, ...there is no temptation that we can't overcome....I like what Rev. Billy Graham said about it...He said, "We can't flee from temptation on our own strength—but Jesus will give us the strength we need, if we will seek it out.So, when the devil knocks,...I just send Jesus to the door!".... That's pretty good advice. When the devil knocks, we need to pray, "Dear Jesus, Satan's knocking at my door.Please go tell Him I'm not home."

Here's the thing...Our best weapon against temptation is to stay close to Jesus...have a personal relationship with our Savior... He knows what it's like to wrestle with temptation...He knows how hard it is to stay true to who we are & whose we are...Satan just hates it when we have a close relationship with Jesus bec He knows that we'll call on Jesus when temptation is beating us down...We'll lean on Jesus for the strength to fight off anything Satan throws at us...And that really ticks him off.

More Good News: we don't have to wait until we're already battling a temptation before we call on Jesus for help. ...Sometimes we need Him to help us to stay away from those places & situations where we could easily be tempted....You know, "Lead us not into temptation."...He'll be like that old country doctor who had a patient come in and tell him, "Doc, I broke my arm in two places,"...and the old doc replied, "Well, then, stay outta them places!" ...If we stay close to Jesus, we'll hear His voice warning us, "Stay outta them places!"...We've got to stay close to Jesus

So, Ok, have I got a deal for you.. Here it is: During this Lent, ...forget about giving up something you like – which really isn't much of a sacrifice, because you'll just replace it with more of something else you like....Instead, join with me to use these 40 days to get closer to Jesus, to strengthen your relationship with Him... Read & meditate on the Gospels. Pray more... Spend person-to-person time with Jesus...No texting or email; He doesn't do those. Person-to-person time,... talking to Him,...Listening to Him just like you would with a close friend...And,

most especially,...try to receive His precious Body & Blood as often as you can. ...We can't get any closer to Jesus than that...

Let's use these next 6 weeks to really strengthen our relationship with Jesus...Let's make this Lent a lot more than giving up M&Ms & ice cream...Ok, so what'll it be...DEAL OR NO DEAL ?