1st Sunday of Lent – Year A

Did you ever notice that every time that we pray the Our Father, we say to God “Lead us not into temptation?” Did you ever ask yourself why God would want to lead us into temptation? Researchers into the prayer suggest that the correct wording should be “Abandon us not when in temptation.” Pope Francis puts it this way, “A father doesn’t do that, a father helps you to get up immediately. It’s Satan who leads us into temptation, that is his department.”

As the first reading from the Book of Genesis makes clear, temptation has its origins with Adam and Eve. As the gospel reading from St. Matthew makes clear, even Jesus was tempted... not just once but three times. Jesus’ temptations can teach us something about our temptations.

Take for example the first temptation to get Jesus to turn stones into bread. One way of interpreting this temptation is to play around with the word “bread.” Bread is sometimes used as a slang term for money. It has its origins in the 1940s in the term “breadwinner.”

Because we live in a capitalistic economy, we seem to measure our success in life in terms of how much money we earn. The more money we have the more successful we are thought to be. In fact, this is now we sell higher education today. It is argued that we can make more money with a college degree. It is the money and not the education that is now important! So, is acquiring as much money as we can one of our temptations? Is money more important than “every word that comes from the mouth of God?”

In the second temptation Jesus is tempted to throw himself down from the parapet of the temple knowing that his angels will catch him before he hits the ground. A way of
interpreting this temptation is to understand it as a temptation to give-up responsibility for our lives. Take for example the many times in our lives when we have refused to take responsibility for a wrong action. In such situations we too frequently like to blame someone else – our parents, or a sibling, or a friend. We refuse to take the blame ourselves. Or perhaps we blame our action on harsh toilet training or some other traumatic experience in our lives? While “nature” and “nurture” influence how much freedom we have, most of us have enough freedom to be responsible for our own actions.

The third temptation is that of power. The devil promises Jesus all the kingdoms of the world if Jesus will worship him. Bishop Sheen, a Catholic evangelist back in the 1950s, in his talks on temptation, said that power is the temptation of middle age – power over one’s spouse or children, power over students or employees, power to do whatever one wants. The focus of such power is not on serving others but rather on serving one’s self. How do you us the power that you have?

Jesus makes it clear that we cannot live for money, that we cannot give-up responsibility for our actions, and that we cannot live for power. Lent is a time for us to ask ourselves: what are my temptations? How do I deal with them?