

## First Sunday of Lent

Some things are more tempting to us than others. If someone tried to talk me into gambling my money away during a night of fun at a casino, that does not really make for much of a temptation to me. I never have been one to gamble. I don't even think about it, really.

Now, if someone invited me to have a second piece of chocolate cake, that would be a different story!

When we think about Jesus being tempted in the desert in today's Gospel, we make a mistake when we think that, being the son of God, he really couldn't have been tempted all that much.

A better way of thinking about Jesus' temptations is recognize that Satan knew what he was doing and picked those temptations which would be the most difficult for Jesus to resist. Satan wanted him to fail.

The temptations Satan chose all have to do with Jesus' identity. They are wrong ways of thinking about what it means to be the Son of God, and wrong ways of thinking about God's mission and how to carry it out.

The temptation to turn a stone into bread must have been one that Jesus was at least willing to consider. It had its attraction. If Jesus is the Son of the God who

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fed the Israelites with manna in the desert, then why not perform a similar miracle. Why couldn't Jesus mission be about providing for all the physical needs of the people he's trying to reach?

The only problem with a strategy like that is that it never worked in the past. It may have provided temporary relief but eventually the Israelites in the desert became arrogant and demanding that God constantly take care of them. They stayed on the level of physical need and never allowed their relationship with God to deepen beyond that.

Jesus' response to Satan is that man "does not live by bread alone." God speaks to the human heart in order to transform it, and for that to happen we have to listen to a deeper need, the need to be transformed into the people God meant for us to be. Satan's idea misses that point and so Jesus rejects it.

Satan's second temptation has to do with power and the ability to influence society. Why wouldn't Jesus want to be able to do that? The problem is that Satan uses the strategy of accusation and division. "Divide and conquer" as the old saying goes.

But Jesus is already committed to another strategy. He adores the Lord whose way is forgiveness and

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reconciliation. Jesus will bring about the kingdom not by the tactics used by worldly power but by the personal call to conversion. Forgive one another and be reconciled is the way forward. That's how the kingdoms of the world will ultimately be transformed.

The last temptation is to “put God to the test” so that it would be crystal clear that Jesus' teachings are authentic and should be followed and that he's not just pursuing his own interests. If Jesus floated down from the temple parapet with the help of angels people would have no choice but to believe in him.

From Jesus' point of view the problem with this strategy is that miracles like that miss the point. The thing that really counts among men is whether they act like God in love, peace and justice.

This is the only real test: Can we imitate the love of God? Demanding a sign is really demanding that God be like the ones demanding it, to share their fear, their ignorance and their lust for certitude.

Jesus sees through that and recognizes that we are called to faith and fidelity even in the midst of our struggles and doubts. That's what spurs us on to further growth.

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The devil did his best to try to seduce Jesus into using strategies that looked like they might further his mission. But Jesus saw them for what they were—betrayals of his identity—and he refused them.

What temptations do we face that try to replace our identity as children of God and coheirs of the kingdom for something that might appear good but will never get us there? This is the season to face them head-on, with the help of the God, who wants us to be transformed into to his way of fullness of love and unity and reconciliation.