

Fr. Curtis Miller

February 20-21, 2021

Homily for the 1st Sunday of Lent

When I was growing up, on the Fridays of Lent, my dad used to always put out a can of tuna on the kitchen counter to remind us not to eat meat. I don't know if any of you do anything similar. I still do it. Maybe you have a better memory than me.

If you resolved to read a chapter from the Bible every day of Lent, then keeping your Bible on your bedside table might be a good reminder. If you gave up eating something for Lent, maybe you'd want to keep that food out of the house, or at least put it somewhere different than usual so you don't grab it out of habit. Reminders like this can be helpful during Lent.

But in a more profound sense, we are called to be living reminders of Lent to each other by faithfully practicing our penances (yet without being showy about it). If our friends or the members of our families see that we are faithfully observing Lent, we can encourage them to do the same.

This can be a struggle, though, because Lent is hard. Ironically, whenever we commit ourselves more to spiritual growth, we are more likely to be tempted. If you resolved to give up gossiping, I guarantee that you'll suddenly start hearing more things you'll want to gossip about. If you resolved to not eat sweets, suddenly you'll see the most delicious looking treats all around you. Temptation is bad, so why does God allow us to be tempted? Why does He let us get into situations where we're more at risk of being unfaithful to Him? It's because the spiritual life is more complicated than we might realize at first.

Yes, temptation is bad, but it can also be an opportunity for us to grow spiritually. If we never face resistance, then we become spiritually weak and flabby. Think about this in the physical world. Gravity always pulls us down. That can be bad, especially when we slip on the ice and fall. But when astronauts live in zero-gravity on the International Space Station for extended periods of time, they lose muscle mass and strength. They need to keep us with special exercises to maintain their health. The same is true spiritually. If we never face any resistance, then we will only become weaker spiritually. And when a major temptation comes our way, we might find ourselves powerless to resist it. That's why we have to train ourselves by regularly resisting the small temptations so that we can be strong enough to resist the big ones.

Temptation isn't just bad; it's a test that God allows us to undergo to help us grow spiritually. And whenever God allows a temptation to come our way, He always supplies along with it the grace and strength we need to resist it, if only we are willing to ask Him for it.

Furthermore, God doesn't leave us to experience our temptations alone. We have the support of our families and our parish community. And even more importantly, Jesus goes out into these deserts of temptation with us. That's why we begin Lent each year with the story of Jesus' forty days in the desert.

The desert of Lent isn't a literal geographical place, but it is a state of mind we enter, a place where we go to get away from our distractions. We take time away from watching tv shows, scrolling through social media, and other entertainments. In the desert of Lent, we leave ourselves with nowhere to hide. Out in the open, we can confront our temptations head-on. Free from all these distracts, we are also better able to sense God's presence and listen to His voice more attentively.

Together, let us begin our Lenten journey in company with Jesus. In this way, we will be able to practice resisting our temptations, grow spiritually, and become a better model to inspire others to do the same.