

Fr Kevin Dillon - HOMILY DATED 21.02.2021

There are many fascinating words in the English language, but one of the most fascinating is the word, *temptation*. Often when it is used to promote a movie it is somehow related to temptation to an illicit relationship, infidelity and so on. It is often, of course a word that we apply when we are enticed, let alone directly offered the opportunity to have for instance, a piece of black forest cake in the middle of Lent, or when we had publicly indicated that we were going off black forest cake, or passionfruit sponge, or whatever it happened to be for the time of Lent but are blatantly tempted by someone, *'Oh go on, it won't hurt you.'* And of course, every time we pray the Lord's Prayer, we say 'Lead us not into temptation...' which is a bit strange when you look at the words as they stand, as if we are asking our Father in Heaven not to lead us into temptation. That's another story all of its own.

The whole question of temptation in life comes up every year in Lent, and in other years when we read the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, we have a more detailed account of what we call the temptations of Jesus, the enticements that were afforded him to pleasure, to pride and to power.

Overall, these are the things that we generally associate with that word, temptation, and it's often associated with food and overindulgence, and the other area which can be a bit more serious which is sexual temptation and so on.

But as we begin the season of Lent, I thought it might be good to look at some other temptations that can come our way, which are not the usual ones, but very present in our lives and maybe, especially in these unprecedented times of COVID 19 lockdowns and restrictions, they may be there even a little more obviously and need to be acknowledged and addressed.

The first temptation is the temptation to try and meet the expectations of everyone. I say that and my guess is that you out there have just said to yourselves, *tell me about it*. It is very much there as we try to follow Jesus as effectively as we can and to treat others the way we would like to be treated. I have all of these phone calls to make, and all of these people who want to see me and I must look after this person and that person, and I can get to a point where I can't do all of this... That is the temptation to think that we can do everything for everybody.

As Catholics we are especially good at guilt and so we take all of that on board, but I was thinking of some of the more dramatic situations of what can go awry when we don't acknowledge that temptation and address it courageously.

Tomorrow, the 22nd of February, is the tenth anniversary of the Christ Church earthquake. I found a story on that which indicates how we can have these very high expectations of ourselves. It was about one of the rescuers.

You might recall that the building that suffered the most deaths was the television station building, that turned out to be not as well built as it should have been. This was a story about Godfrey Nosa with his mate, Evan McLellan, and they saved a number of lives on that day ten years ago. When he was interviewed afterwards, he said that the most terrible memory of it was of those they couldn't save. He said, 'We heard those who were stuck inside the building, but we couldn't get to them because the fire was getting worse.' Having to give up with survivors still inside devastated both Godfrey and Evan. They remember hearing the voices. It was as though someone had their hand over their mouths, and they were trying to scream. Evan said, 'I can hear them we can get under there.' Godfrey (speaking) said, 'No we can't.' At that stage, the smoke was just too much. We were both crying.

Awful. Good, brave and courageous people. But afterwards they were thinking. Did we do enough? Could we have done more? Could we have saved one more life?

On the one hand it is a very noble thing to go down that track of could we always have done more, but on the other hand it's built around that temptation to expect the impossible of ourselves. Maybe that is one temptation during this Lent, as I mentioned on Ash Wednesday when we take that long hard look at ourselves, to think, *Is that something I have to manage, not to expect too much of myself?*

Temptation number two is the exact opposite – the temptation to let ourselves off the hook. Oh, someone else can look after that, I've done enough already, I'm not going to do anymore etc. when in fact we could do more without harm to ourselves and we could use a bit more generosity in our life to reach out to the needs of others. We have to find the balance between the expectation of trying to meet the needs of everybody and then being so slack that we don't do much worthwhile at all and it's all about ourselves and our own convenience. The real trick is trying to find that balance. Finding that balance can be very stressful and what happens when we are very stressed? Temptation number three enters the equation.

Temptation number three is to take it out on the people who need us the most and love us most. Often when we are stressed, we look for an outlet and that can be someone who is not at fault, who themselves is doing their best and who, maybe themselves is very stressed and doing their best, who deep down we may know that we love very dearly and who loves us, but maybe we take

it out on them because we know that they will accept it, manage it and forgive us. They will be there tomorrow, the next day and the next. That is another temptation that we can do when we hit the stress button a bit hard and we can do this to people who don't deserve it. We have to recognize that at times like this when the stress level is elevated that they are under stress too. We need to try and resist the temptation to respond this way, so that we do not add to their load. We need to keep this in check as best we can.

The temptations of Jesus are the historical ones, and the ones that are always there for us – the temptations to pleasure, pride and power, but these other ones are there for any of us in this day and age. Think of that song, the lyrics are 'You always hurt the one you love, the one you shouldn't hurt at all,' I think it was a fellow with the most extraordinary name, Clarence Frogman Henry who wrote those lyrics.

Maybe this is something to think about as we begin the season of Lent during the modern, COVID times to see whether we can get that balance in life that we need, not to have to meet the needs of everybody, but not to let ourselves off the hook too readily, and then to make sure that we don't take it out on those who love us most.