

## **FACING AND FIGHTING TEMPTATION: 1<sup>ST</sup> SUNDAY LENT A**

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A fruiterer was watching a boy standing in front of his fruit stall and gazing at all the beautiful fruit on display. After a while he could restrain himself no longer. *'What are you trying to do, young man,'* he asked, *'steal my apples?'* *'No sir,'* said the boy, *'I'm trying not to.'* That little story says that the child had come to understand that he was not a puppet on a string, but faced a choice: Will I do the right thing or the wrong thing? It also says just how real temptations of all kind can be, and just what a tension and struggle it can be not to give in.

Thank God we still have the living memory of Jesus, his teaching, example and presence, to remind us that by turning to him for strength and support, we can overcome our temptations. Even if our past record in resisting temptation has been spotty to say the least, we can eventually triumph, not by our own sheer will-power and determination, but through our faith and trust in Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit. As a priest once put it to a man he met outside the monastery gate. *'We fall down, we get up. We fall down, we get up. We fall down, we get up. The saints are just the sinners who fall down and get up.'*

Today we remember Jesus' own secret in resisting temptation. But doing so was no easier for him than it is for us. As a matter of fact he went through a terrible struggle to choose between God and self. The tension and agony of it all are spelled out for us today in Matthew's dramatic story of the temptations in the desert. What they have in common is that they are temptations to selfishness.

First the tempter suggests to Jesus, who is terribly hungry after his forty-day fast in the desert: *'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to turn into [loaves of] bread.'* In other words, make use of things, not for the benefit of others but for your own satisfaction, comfort and convenience. But even though Jesus' stomach is rumbling and he is near to desperation for a bite to eat, he will not dally with this desire, not even for a moment. Instead he seeks nourishment of a different kind, in God's clear message in Scripture - *'One does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'*

The second temptation which taunts Jesus is to go to the very top of the Temple in Jerusalem, and defy the law of gravity by taking a flying leap from there. Surely a stunt like that, a bit of razzle-dazzle, will attract a horde of followers, and prove to Jesus personally whether God cares about him or not. The very thought of it is fascinating. Jesus, however, completely dislodges the idea from his mind as he remembers and relishes God's clear command in Scripture: *'You must not put the Lord your God to the test.'*

Jesus has survived two kinds of temptation. But the idea that comes to him next is more subtle and more appealing. This is to use his intelligence, ability to organise, and personal charm, to gather round him the rich and powerful from every nation, and become a great political leader, even king of the world. This is a temptation to seek world attention and become a celebrity, a temptation to be a political messiah pursuing fame, fortune, and empire-building. The attraction of this temptation is the very opposite of what God has said in Scripture about his chosen messiah, the saviour of the world. God clearly means his

messiah to be a humble, suffering servant, someone willing to sacrifice his young life in love. Jesus remembers this and takes it to heart. And so he simply blitzes the suggestion with yet another clear command of God in Scripture: *'You must worship the Lord your God, and serve him alone.'*

Remember! Jesus is feeling very weak, very fragile, and very vulnerable. He has had nothing to eat or drink for forty days. And yet his fidelity and love towards God don't waver for a moment. What, then, is his secret? His secret is his reliance on hearing and heeding the Word of God in the Scriptures. He just keeps nourishing his mind, his heart, his attitudes, his life, by remembering the Word of God.

You and I have often been exposed to temptations of one kind or another - to pride, anger, lust, gluttony, greed, jealousy, sloth, etc. Like Jesus we have turned to God for guidance and strength when we've been tempted. Perhaps we have relied especially on the power of those healing sacraments - Reconciliation and Eucharist?

But for better results when we are tempted, we would do well to do also what Jesus did - read the Scriptures, reflect on the Scriptures, and pray the Scriptures. The texts of the Masses for Lent provide us with a guided reading programme, a programme for changing our minds, hearts and lives. It is time to make Lent what it is meant to be, a time for correcting our faults and raising our minds and hearts to God. A time for personal and community conversion! A time for personal and community renewal! A time for coming face-to-face with God - our origin, our purpose and our destiny - and being changed for the better and forever by that healing encounter!