

From the parish priest's desk ~ Our Lenten Journey

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT: CHRIST'S 40 DAYS IN THE DESERT

Overcoming Temptation



The Temptation of Christ on the Mountain by Duccio di Buoninsegna
c.1308-11

Sometimes we find it useful to meditate on a picture. Some food for thought here Notice the majesty of Christ, the smallness of the kingdoms offered, the symbolic colours etc. We also forget that Christ's temptation did take place on a mountain.

Dear Faithful,

Each Sunday of Lent has a special teaching and today being the first Sunday of Lent it focuses on Christ's forty days in the desert and his subsequent temptation. So the first thing that we must be aware of is that we are entering into a battle: Pope Emeritus Benedict: " What does entering Lent mean? It means we enter a season of special commitment in the spiritual battle to oppose the evil present in the world and in each one of us and around us. It means not off-loading the problem onto others, onto society or onto God but recognising our own responsibility and assuming it with awareness."

What are the stages of temptation?

Temptation is something that we all have to undergo as it is a purification that enables us to love God more. Cf Ecclesiasticus Chp 2. But we have to be on guard. There are three stages of temptation:

1. We entertain temptation; we listen; we are attracted due to our attachment to sin.
2. We dialogue: we debate the issue we consider the pros and cons.
3. We commit.

We can see the stages clearly in how the devil tempts Adam and Eve. The quickest way to conquer temptation is not to enter into any discussion but as soon as we are aware to block it out.

Why do we fail?

- Sometimes God permits us to fail so that we learn the virtues of patience and humility and to recognise that we shall only succeed when we trust in God's strength not our own.

- Sometimes we don't want to succeed enough—we will only succeed when we love God more than we love the sin.
- Sometimes we just want to give up because the temptation is taxing our strength; this is what we could call coming down from the cross.
- Most importantly, we have allowed the temptation in. St. Hannibal di Francia has a most powerful message: “Many times our mind is cluttered with fleeting thoughts. And if our mind is not completely filled with God, we cause the devil to bother us and maybe even foment temptations. When our mind is filled with God, as the devil approaches us and not finding the place toward which to direct his temptations, confuse, he flees. In fact holy thoughts have so much power against the devil that, as he is about to approach us, they wound him like many swords and drive him away.....It is our poor vigilance that causes our enemy to assault us.”

The key is to remember that in Christ our temptations have already been conquered.....by him. In other words he has already given us the necessary strength. But we don't rely on his grace, his strength but our own which is why so often we fail.

Some good scripture verses to ponder:

- “In all these things we conquer through him who loves us.” (Rom 8:37)
- "In all these things we triumph through him who loves us"(Rom 5:38
- “By His power we can do infinitely more than we can ask for or imagine.” (Eph 3:20)

Some good parables to read:

- The prodigal son. Luke 15
- The Lost Sheep. The Lost Coin. Luke 15

In his pastoral letter, Bishop Patrick encourage us to celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation. Pope Francis says: “ So many people, including young people are returning to the sacrament of reconciliation; through this experience they are discovering a path back to the Lord, living a moment of intense prayer and finding meaning in their lives. Let us place the sacrament of reconciliation at the centre once more, in such a way that it will enable people to touch the grandeur of God’s mercy with their own hands.”

Confession for many has become the forgotten sacrament. Sometimes because we doubt God’s love and his power to forgive our worst offences. Also, we have lost the sense of sin. Lastly, we may be afraid and nervous. Whatever the reason let us conquer our nervousness and plunge into the mercy of God. The sacrament of reconciliation also cannot be divorced from Holy Communion, the two go hand in hand. Even though we only have to go to confession before communion if we have committed serious sin, nonetheless, a good confession of venial sin enables us to be more open to the grace available through communion.

Lent is the time when God wishes to pour out his graces upon us and this is especially true in his forgiveness of sin. I encourage everyone to take the plunge. Another good practice to help us is to make each day an examination of conscience when we look over the day and see God’s help and presence as well as those moments when we have either sinned or not been loyal to God’s wishes. This over time will enable us to see sin much more clearly.

Lastly, a suggestion that I have based on the Hours of the Passion. We ask Jesus to send his crown of thorns to us and allow each thorn to remove from us an attachment, difficulty or anything that opposes the Lord. Then we ask him to leave one thorn in our soul to protect us against anything entering that opposes him.