

## **Lent 1: HOW TO OVERCOME TEMPTATIONS (Luke 4:1-13)**

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A story is told of a driver who'd been circling around the block looking for a parking space. Finally in desperation, he decided to park his car in the space under the "No Parking" sign and left a note on his windshield addressed to the traffic cop: "Sir, I'm in a hurry and can't find a parking space but I'll be back in a minute. Please don't give me a ticket because the Lord's Prayer says, 'forgive us our trespasses.'" When he came back, there was a parking ticket from the police which says, "Thank you for your note and I really appreciate it. But I must give you a ticket because the Lord's Prayer also says, 'Lead us not into temptation.'"

What is a temptation? How is temptation related to sin? What is sin and how do we overcome temptation? The Gospel today speaks about the temptations of Jesus and how he was able to overcome them. His example provide insights on how we too can overcome the temptations of our lives.

### **1. Temptation and Sin Defined**

A dictionary defines temptation as an enticement or attraction to commit sin. And what is sin? A sin means a transgression or violation of divine law. In other words, temptation is not a sin; it is when you yield to temptation that you commit a sin. Temptation is like a bait in a hook. So long as the fish does not bit the hook, it is free. But when it bites the bait, it can get hooked.

In the Book of Genesis, temptation is related to making a choice. God has given Adama and Eve the free will to make a choice. They can freely eat of the fruits of the Garden of Eden but there was this one fruit that was forbidden. Now they can be free forever eating of every fruit of the Garden but the temptation of this one tree was much to bear. So they had to make a choice: obey God by not eating the forbidden fruit or disobey God by eating the forbidden fruit. They freely chose to disobey so they were punished by God. They were driven out of the Garden of Eden. They made the wrong choice and that wrong choice was the sin.

There is another way of looking at sin. Romans 3:23 says, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Sin is defined here as "missing the mark." Have you seen the logo of *Target*? It is a series of circles, the outer circle is big and the inner circles are smaller and the center of the circle is known as the 'Bull's Eye.' When you through a dart, the bull-eye becomes the perfect score and the larger circles are still within the mark but not as perfect. But when you hit outside the large circle, you really missed the mark.

To make the point: sin means missing the mark. The bull's eye is the perfect will of God. To miss the circle is a sin. Sin is thinking, saying and doing things that are not in accord with the will of God.

### **Three Temptations**

In the Gospel this morning, there were three temptations that Jesus had to overcome: physical, moral and spiritual. It can also be described as temptations of money, fame and power.

The first temptation is one that strikes at the very basic human need. The need for food, clothing and shelter are basic needs that every living person is entitled to. When you are hungry, you need to eat; when you are thirsty, you have to drink. A basic living includes food to eat, clothes to wear and a house to live in.

I remember the time when I first tried not to eat the whole day. It was in the seminary on Ash Wednesday. We had a service at the chapel and we were admonished to practice fasting for at least a day. No food will be served from noon to sunset. Now some of the seminarians really try to observe it but I know that some cheated by hiding some biscuits or crackers in their rooms. Now I really was serious in observing it but by 4 p.m. my stomach began to complain and my head was getting dizzy and my meditative reading of the bible was not really helping me. At this point, a friend of mine, who was not a seminarian invited me to their home. He was Chinese and that day, happened to be Chinese New Year---and there was lots of food! And you know what happened? I made the choice: I succumbed to temptation.

So Jesus decided to fast and pray forty days and forty nights. The devil knew the human weakness and asked Jesus about his identity: "If you are the Son of God, turn these stones into loaves of bread." In other words, since you are hungry, eat! But if Jesus succumbed to this temptation, then he would not be able to know that there is something more important than the material world. So he replied to Satan and quote the Scripture: "Man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

The second temptation was about fame. If Jesus had to make his message known, then it was important that people would listen to him. And what would be more attractive than being a celebrity! You may sing, you may dance, you may walk on the tightrope, you may eat nails and bottles, you may do everything to make yourself be attractive or spectacular! And what could be more spectacular for Jesus than to throw himself down from the pinnacle of the Temple and be born by the angels? People would worship him like Superman! But if Jesus succumbed to that temptation, then the faith of the people would be on the miracle and not on God. So Jesus told the devil, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."

The third and final temptation was about power. The devil showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and said, "all these will be yours if you bow down and worship me." There is a saying which says, "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely." If Jesus succumbed to the temptation, then he would be part of the corrupts of these worldly kingdoms and would not have the integrity to point people to the presence of the other kingdom, the heavenly kingdom. Jesus knew that earthly kingdoms rise and fall but only the heavenly kingdom stands forever. And so he rebuked Satan and quote the Scripture: "Worship the Lord your God and only Him shall you serve." Then Satan left and the angels ministered to Jesus.

## **Conclusion**

What lessons can we derive from the temptations of Jesus?

First, it is important to know the Word of God. Jesus knew the will of the Father because he knew the Word of God. The argument of the devil can not withstand the power of the Word of God.

Second, it is important to know the will of God for our lives. Albert Einstein, the greatest mathematician the world ever produced once said, "I want to know the will of God...the rest are details."

Third, it is important to know our priorities in life. As a Christian minister, I always understand my order of priorities to be the following: God, Family, Work and everything else. It is important to put Jesus as the center of my life; then to put my family and my work or ministry in the context of God's will. May God bless you to order your own priority so that you may overcome temptations and do the perfect will of God. Amen. .