

Lent 1
St. Luke 4:1-13
February 14, 2016
St. George's Bolton
Fr. Chris

Time of Trial

"When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time."

The devil made me do it! It's all their fault. I am a victim here, not the perpetrator! I am all about blaming someone else for my troubles and mistakes. I want to be the *good guy*, and good guys don't make mistakes. *Good guys do not commit sins*. They are never at fault!

Jesus answer to the devil, unlike mine, is: *no thank you sir*. While Jesus is trying to concentrate on his prayers and his quiet retreat to the wilderness before he begins his public ministry in earnest, in this Spartan place he is put to the test. And he passes each test with flying colors, not surprisingly. Would that I were able to do the same.

But Lent is a time for us to be tested as we undertake new disciplines to improve our lives and our health, whether physical or spiritual. The damnable part of Lent is the little red guy and his temptations.

Hungry because you chose to go on a diet or stop eating food that is bad for you? What's a little diversion from your discipline? What horrible wrong would you be doing if you had a bowl of ice

cream or a bag of chips? How sinful is that, *I mean really?* And so what if you go outside and take a few puffs off a cigarette, it won't matter! Like that gal at the office? Go on- take her out for dinner or a drink and let's see what happens! Your wife won't have an idea about what is going on because you can say you were out bowling or something.

Need some money to repower your life? Why not invest in a lottery ticket. It's not really gambling or throwing money away. It goes to a good cause, doesn't it? Or you could also save some money on your taxes if you don't report the extra under the table income—go on—you worked hard for it, don't be an idiot and give it to the government! Want to be the big guy at work? Manipulate the system, crush the competition by saying what you need to say and starting rumors to crush the other candidates and eliminate them from the competition. Tell little "white" lies on your resume, and then lord it over those peons you work with when you achieve your new status! You will finally get the respect and admiration you deserve, and you deserve to be the boss! Make the "*right*" choices in life and you will receive "*my kingdom on earth!*" Remember, Good guys finish last!

Hey- let's make life more exciting-go on, take the risk and go bungee jumping off that cliff. It's fine. You'll be fine! Your better angels will not let your foot hit the ground! Take a risk and take your savings to the casino tonight and double your money. You won't lose a cent, I promise! Just do it. Don't be the safety guy and blow all your chances and never take risks!

And there you have it: the three big temptations that Jesus faced: the temptation to indulge your habits; the temptation to grab for power over others, whether by the power of money or raw political power; and the temptation to tempt fate and risk

your life for frivolous pursuits, thereby tempting God. These are some of the many we experience every day. Jesus faced them all alone in the wilderness after his baptism in the Jordan. And he passed the test!

So what is this test business? The modern translation of the Lord's Prayer uses the phrase, "*do not bring us to the test.*" Our own prayer book renders it in contemporary language as: "*save us from the time of trial.*" The more common English translation renders it as, "*Lead us not into temptation.*" Now why would God want to do that, I have always wondered?

The answer is that *God does not lead us into temptation*, our own free will and willfulness does! God created a world in which we were given freedom of choice, and the choice is to either do God's will or not do God's will. Why a choice when it comes to God's will? Because you can't force someone to love you! They must choose to love you on their own. Love must be your own free choice. You can't make someone love you: that is **not** love. Simple as that. When we pray the Lord's Prayer we are simply asking God to save us or help us endure and resist the temptations, the trials which life hands us and which we have the power to struggle with and subdue. But it is so much easier when we are empowered with God's help. We do not have to face the trials and tests of our character alone. God will strengthen us if we invite God into our hearts and allow God to fill them up with God's love and compassion.

It cuts to a question of the content of your character. How often have I grabbed one of those .99-cent store bags in the grocery line, only to see the clerk pass it by the scanner without charging me for it, thinking I brought it to use instead of swiping it and making me pay. Here I am trying to do something

nice for the church, collecting these bags to give out at the Mobile Foodshare pantry. Should I take the bag for free or should I hand it back to her and tell her to scan it? Surely God was trying to save me some money here! But if I make this choice it invalidates any kindness I am trying to do, and it makes me a thief. Such an action for .99 cents speaks volumes about my true character: *"if you are dishonest in a little, you will also be dishonest in much."* [Luke 16:10]

Another important point we need to take away from today's Gospel is the epiphany that God cares about us enough to experience the same tension we experience when we are put to the test and face the trials which life brings us. God came to earth and knows first hand our struggle between choosing God's desire for us and choosing our own selfish desires. I like that God is not some distant cosmic cop completely removed from and above our human experience. God faced the temptations we face daily and showed us that we do not need to succumb to them. God showed us that he understands what it means to be human.

We begin this Lent desiring to conquer the temptations that have plagued us. We do not need to face them alone. God is with us in the dark valleys of life. Ask God for help. Your faith can strengthen you to face temptation and prevail. Remember there is no such thing as a white lie or a tiny sin. A sin is a sin. There is always an opportune time for temptation. If you think the devil be gone, be sure the devil will come another day, even another hour. There will always be a pop quiz around the next corner.

When you are wrong, admit it and move on. Hear the message of God's forgiveness. Sin is a cancer in our lives, but there is a cure for it. Seek the cure this Lent and live a healthy spiritual life.
AMEN

