

The First Sunday of Lent
St. Luke 4:1-13
March 10, 2019
St. George's Bolton
Fr. Chris

Deliver us From Temptation

As Jesus begins his public ministry, he faces temptation in the wilderness. The Devil tempted him with food, worldly power and ego. None of these worked. But after all, He is Jesus. Could I have resisted the same temptations? Truth is, I have failed and succumbed to all three of these temptations.

We fight temptation and resist it with tools called impulse control and self-discipline. If those are not enough, (and likely, they are not) you can ask God for help.

We live in a culture that promotes temptation and succumbing to it because it is good business. Each day we face a barrage of temptations.

I love my coffee. But that is not enough, is it? When I stop into the local coffee shop, visiting my first business of the day, I am faced with a huge number of choices and really tempting things. Right in front of me, behind the cashier, is a wonderful selection of fresh donuts of every sort you could imagine. There are a number of breakfast sandwiches to tempt you if you look up at the menu board, again, with very beautiful pictures and descriptions to tempt your pallet. And I just came in for a cup of coffee! Can I leave with only a cup of coffee? Regardless of whether I have eaten breakfast at home, I am tempted to get something more to eat. And I have often succumbed to temptation on the spot.

Most of the time I can resist the temptation. I know that empty carbs are not good for me, and I try to remember what I am there to get. And then, now there is Lent as an added boost to my self-discipline. I can say no. Sometimes God helps and removes my favorite temptations. Let me tell you about them. There is one Dunkin' Donuts in Manchester, I won't mention where, (because I don't need any competition buying them up) that daily makes my favorite temptation for a coffee shop: The frosted coffee role. They take an already sugary glazed coffee roll and smother it in a chocolate frosting. Delicious! Does your mouth water as I describe it? And then there is the concoction I cannot resist. Same coffee roll, but this time they smother it in maple frosting. Incredible! Irresistible! At least for me, I find it

almost impossible to resist. Because, as you might imagine, they are so popular, they sell out rather quickly. And when I want a coffee, I try to resist visiting that particular Dunkin Shop, until I look for a reward for my hard work at the end of the day, but often find that they have sold out of my favorite temptation much earlier because it is so popular! When I came to buy my daily reward and indulgence, I like to think God played a role in helping me by delivering me from the temptation. (Where have we heard that prayer before?)

As you can tell, I am well schooled in the rationalizations for indulging in a temptation. I have often succumbed to the cultural training in advertising to yield to the temptations and forget the “silly self-discipline” which calls me to resist. I mean, after all, as they say, I deserve it. I deserve a break today. I mean, why not? What harm can a little indulgence do? Ahh, what redemption in a small confection! What heavenly bliss! What Nirvana!

But is that what I worked so hard for? And do I really need a maple frosted coffee roll at the end of the day to make me feel rewarded for the work that I have done? How long will that pleasure last, do you suppose? Just a few brief minutes, depending how fast I wolf it down. And how will I feel after succumbing? What are the long-term consequences if I adopt this behavior as a habit?

The tools with which we do battle with temptation have also gotten a bad name in our culture. Perhaps this is another message sent from Madison Avenue and the ad agencies to undermine our will power for their manipulative purposes to make profits for their clients.

Take self-discipline or even the word “discipline.” What thoughts and experience do you associate with the word? It seems to me that they are not very positive. I think of being disciplined in school. I think of the harsh discipline of “boot camp,” whether military or the modern gym class programs. I think of being disciplined in the workplace. The word evokes thoughts of being punished for some wrongdoing, whether by someone else or even punishing my own self. When you say someone is a disciplined person, you don’t think good thoughts about them, but rather that they are an up-tight, humorless person into self control, and if that, maybe controlling others. All of these thoughts are very negative. They make discipline sound like the third rail on a subway track, something you really don’t want to get near.

But at work I know several of my co-workers who exhibit far greater discipline in their eating habits than myself. They do not get preachy about it. They do not exhibit their self-discipline in any overt way as though you would be struck to

notice it. Instead, you really have to be looking to notice the good self-discipline they exert in their lives with their diet and exercise. I stand in awe of them. They practice humility in their lives and lord their discipline over no one. They seek health, and they do not seek to control me or anyone else. Their practice of discipline has none of the negative traits implied in my mind or by Madison Avenue.

Yet discipline and self control are not our enemies, but rather our friends, our tools to have a happier, healthier and stress free life. When we can make good healthy choices, both physically and spiritually, we learn to live in harmony with the world and we honor the body we have been given as a temple of the Holy Spirit. These are not dirty words, but the keys to the kingdom. Freedom from stress. Freedom from guilt. Freedom from illness. Freedom from being controlled by outside forces.

Yes, the devil will return at a more opportune time, as the Gospel promises this morning. He always does. But the battle for today is over, and we can claim victory at the end of the day if we stay the course. Ask God for help in keeping your discipline and maintaining self-control to resist the multiple temptations which assault all of us and can hurt the soul. With God's help, there is hope! There is a light at the end of the tunnel. And God will walk with you, his rod and staff are a comforting presence to us. AMEN