

On this the first Sunday of Lent we always have the same reading about Christ's temptation in the wilderness. We all face temptations constantly, and so hearing how Jesus faced and overcame temptations can help us all.

We can often think that if we are really doing what we should be doing then we won't experience temptation of any kind – but this isn't how it works. Temptation is part of the human condition.

This passage comes immediately after Jesus's baptism by John in the Jordan at the start of his public ministry. Until I focused on the text I hadn't really taken in that he's led into the wilderness not by the devil but by the Spirit of God, the same spirit that settled on him at his baptism when God's voice said 'You are my Son'.

Temptations can be roughly broken down into 3 categories – and these equate to Jesus's experience in our Gospel reading.

First – physical temptations – turn these stones into bread.

Second – emotional temptations – indulging our feelings, our ego, making ourselves the centre of things, looking for attention, glory praise etc – you can have all of this that's laid out before you - if you worship me.

Thirdly – spiritual temptations – testing God – daring God to prove his love for us. Jump - he'll catch you when you fall!

Jesus showed us the way to rebuff all these types of temptations and put our focus firmly back on God.

Jesus knows how hard it is to walk the walk and talk the talk. He knows how easy it is to close your eyes to the troubles around you, shut your ears to the cries of those in need. He knows the attraction of a quick fix and the struggle to keep on the narrow path. He stands with us ready to help as soon as we call on him.

Our first reading was from Deuteronomy and this whole book is attributed to Moses as a series of speeches. Moses is speaking to the people as they stand outside the Promised land looking in in wonder. The book is basically Moses's last will and testament to Israel as he prepares to die. At that time they shared their history orally as part of their worship – they told their story out loud – our reading focuses on him encouraging his people to remember their gratitude to God for where they were and not to get complacent. God was faithful. God is faithful. They were to live a life where they acknowledged their genuine gratitude to God.

The words gratitude and grace are related in English. And in the Greek of the bible one word serves for both – charis.

Each of Jesus's responses to the devil's temptations are also from Deuteronomy and are descriptions of what thankful people do and say before God.

Many of our temptations revolve around what we have and what we do not have. Today's Old Testament reading can be taken as both a warning and a blessing, reminding us that everything we have is a gift from God. Everything is by His grace.

We are tempted by the promises of the world but more so by self doubt, insecurity, feelings of inadequacy, fear of failure, and that's when those worldly promises take hold, because they promise an instant fix. Buy this, go there, act like this, wear this and you'll fit in, you'll be confident and have lots of friends and be happy.

Thinking, reflecting, meditating about how we follow Jesus and are faithful to his teachings is an on-going task and the start of Lent is a good time to reflect on such on-going goals for our discipleship.

We face situation after situation every day, some of which are relatively trivial, but some have major consequences in which the choice is not between good and evil but between what is hard and what is easy.

Christ has set us free from our sinful doubts so that we trust that God has given us more money and gifts than we need for ourselves, and that He will continue to provide. Our discipline of giving reminds us that everything is a gift from God. Giving away reminds us that money is not an idol to cling to.

But the devil uses all these gifts from God – whether money, food, clothes, cars, medical care etc – to provoke covetousness, jealousy, discontent and doubt. He exploits them as false evidence that we don't need God, look at what you've got! Why then do you need God? And if you happen to suffer misfortune the Devil is right there to tempt you to drop God and turn away. He tries to make you doubt God, or hate God or see no need for God – his ultimate goal is to destroy your faith in Christ.

Like Jesus though we can respond "man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord!"

God's word tells us that today and every day He loves us and that neither death, nor life nor anything in all of creation can separate us from this love.

Everything we have is a gift from God. An undeserved gift. It's tough to believe this all the time and especially when we face temptations, but God's word promises that we are children of God. Loved equally and totally by him.

God says Trust me – we want to, we want to let go and let God. But we don't we are tempted to doubt. We want to trust God to lead us by the Holy Spirit, but doubts creep in.

Practice trusting God through Lent. We are not alone, God is with us and allows the temptations we face because they are part of free-will.

So rather than beat yourself up for feeling tempted, or start to slip into an old habitual response to a particular temptation...see it as a means to grow in Grace and experience the power of God in overcoming temptations.

Whether great or small it doesn't matter, each one is an opportunity to experience God's grace.

Being tempted isn't sinful; Jesus was tempted and we will be too. It's how we respond that is the key.

Carol Elsasser, 9 March 2025