

Lent 1: 'Temptation of Jesus'
'What does God say?'

Deut 26:1-11; Ps. 91:1-2,9-16; Rom.10:4-13; Lk 4:1-15

Hands up ... if you've ever been 'hangry?' You're desperately hungry, and the longer you must wait, the angrier you feel?! Hands up ... if you've ever felt needy? You never got that valentine card ... the kids have moved out and you're an empty nester ... or your spouse just doesn't pay you enough attention? And hands up if you've ever gotten so distraught at failing an exam or being rejected from a job interview?

We all have real needs – physical hunger needs – emotional security needs – and the egoic need for status. But the temptation to fulfil these needs at any cost – which damages our relationship with God, others and self – is where the real challenge lies, but such temptations are mastered by Jesus as he wanders through the desert for 40 days.

That's a *long* and lonely time to go without food, love and status. Would *he* have been hangry ... needy ... mad? Temptation is a powerful emotion ...

Described as an immediate, pleasurable urge...an *impulse* that disrupts the ability to wait for the long-term goals in which that individual hopes to attain ... temptation is often a combination of a real need – *food, love and status* – and a possible doubt. *Will* God provide the food we need? *Will* God protect and love us? And *will* God rule? And from these seeds of doubt ... we generate *unholy* desires. Satan (the fallen angel) exploits our weaknesses. Unsure of our future, we stop listening to the Voice, the Voice of the Holy Spirit and begin listening, instead, to our own voices to ensure our needs are met. And *this* is what leads to trouble ... our way, instead of Yahweh!

Too much or too little food leads to life threatening eating disorders. Sexual immorality leads to lifeless and stressful marriages. And the need to climb up the career ladder for financial gain and notoriety ... hurting people on the way up ... is not the holy life God calls us to.

Our enemies of the soul -the flesh, the world and the devil – are in direct opposition to the three persons of the Trinity. So what do we do? When we are tempted – typically in our times of vulnerability like Jesus was in the desert – what do we do?

When Jesus was tempted physically, *when hungry*, rather than become impatient and rather than succumbing to the devil's demand to prove his Sonship, Jesus focused upon God's purpose. He depended upon God and he quoted Scripture, saying ... it is written ...

"One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God"

So, in our moments of physical temptation, we need to ask ...

"What does God say?"

When Jesus was tempted emotionally, *when unprotected*, rather than allow any insecurity to pridefully test God and succumb to the devil's demand to prove his Sonship again, Jesus focused upon God's plan. He refused to test God and again quoted Scripture, saying...it is written ...

"Do not put the Lord your God to the test."

So, in our moments of emotional temptation, we need to ask ...

"What does God say?"

And when Jesus was tempted egoically, *when feeling insignificant*, rather than opt for easy solutions to assert his power and equality with God, Jesus focused upon the person of God alone. He refused to compromise with evil and quoted Scripture, saying...it is written....

“Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.”

So, in our moments of egoic temptation, we need to ask...

“What does God say?”

Paul tells us in the Romans reading ...

‘The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart!’

And when we’ve discerned the answer to what *God* says, (which often invites wise counsel from several people) what do we do then?

If *God* says, we need to be patient (and calm down, it’s only food, we won’t die from hunger!)...if *God* says, we need develop security in the relationships he has given us (not run off to someone else)...and if *God* says, we need to be humble under his rule and worship him...(rather than *rebel*), we will need the God given *grace* to do it... and the God given *grace* to be it!

So, in line with our Psalmist reading today, *‘because you have made the Lord your refuge, the Most High your dwelling-place, no evil shall befall you,’* it’s safe to turn to him and speak of your temptations, name them...and receive the words you need from God, to speak against the temptation. *‘Those who love me, I will deliver, continues the Psalmist, I will protect those who know my name. When they call to me, I will answer them; I will be with them in trouble, I will rescue them and honour them.’*

Indeed ...

‘For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.’

So let’s confess our *temptations*, **before** they become sins! We are not to nurse, curse or rehearse the struggle with temptation, but to reverse it ... by confessing. We can nip sin in the bud by becoming aware of the Holy Spirit convicting us at the beginning of sin ... in our temptations, and thereby help ourselves by preventing a whole range of physical and psychological consequences – from MS to Depression, from cancers to anxiety and a whole myriad of interpersonal conflict.

In the midst of our temptation...therefore...when we want to pull away from God...when we want to dis-member ourselves and dis -connect from God and listen to *our* head, heart or gut voice...that’s exactly the time when we need to lean *into* the wisdom of God’s Voice...and ask...

“What does God say?”

In the midst of our temptations ... let’s choose to tune out the cacophony of human voices ... let’s stop siding with the world, the devil and the flesh voices and lets stop agreeing with the manipulative, “Did God really say that?!” voice ... and instead ... turn back to God and pray for the grace ... to listen to the wise voice ... that answers the question ...

“What does God say?”

Amen!