

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

**Shared Human Temptations**    First Sunday in Lent/C    February 14, 2016    5:00 Vigil  
Mass    Dt 26:4-10;    Rom 10:8-13;    **Lk 4:1-13**    (All temptations are all about our being  
the center of life, having others serve us, or our controlling them, or getting them to do what we  
want or what we think best, to use opportunities to our advantage, even offering help that we  
want to offer.)

If you were to sit and read the whole New Testament in one sitting, you would see that the way the evangelists portray **Jesus' life, it is a contest between him and the devil**, between him and this agent of evil, from beginning to end. And it always marks great interest in people when they realize that Jesus himself met with temptation, real temptation; and he had real freedom, and that is our belief. His freedom was not absorbed by God; that's a heresy I won't mention, but that's not what we believe. **He was free. And part of freedom involves temptation.** It's actually a necessary component of who we are as human beings. Jesus was fully human, so he had to meet with temptation as well. This story begins after his baptism. **In his baptism he was affirmed by his heavenly Father.** "You are my beloved—you are my beloved; in you I am well pleased."

**Then the Holy Spirit led him into the desert. Now the desert is a place of being on your own.** We all get there at some point in life, a place with no friends, no family, no one to support us except God because God is everywhere. God cannot be excluded from the desert. So sooner or later **we all will find ourselves in some kind of a desert. And there is where we meet our temptations, and there is where we decide who we will be.** That is not yet decided. We are not born a specific person; we are just born with potential. We decide who we shall be. We decide what kind of human being we shall be.

**It is God's plan for us to constantly grow and develop through life.** And if we listen to God in our temptations and if we follow God's counsels and God's help, we will continually grow in life. **But we are free not to.** We are free to take a different course. And very often when

we take a different course, we end up stuck—stuck, unable to grow, unable to move. The word used in Scripture for this “stuckness” is enslavement or bondage. Modern language often uses the word “addiction” in many different ways. That’s the idea: **stuckness, addiction, bondage, enslavement. That’s not choosing the way God has for us. Of course God’s way for us often involves accepting pain, suffering, limitations, and certainly giving up control. Jesus had to make the choice just as we do to be a loyal child of God, to surrender control to his Father and live a human life.**

And that’s what he was doing in the desert. He was preparing himself. He fasted to clear his mind. The side effect of fasting however is weakness, physical weakness. So he was weak. And the devil comes to him as a friend. **Usually the devil comes to us as a friend.** “Oh, I’ve got some good advice for you. You are so hungry, why don’t you turn these stones into bread?” Now you might say what’s so evil about that? Well, first of all, the devil is tempting him to find out who he is. The devil doesn’t know. The devil realizes there is something weird about this guy, but the devil does not have supernatural knowledge. So he is watching. He sees things very unusual. He knows there are unusual circumstances about his birth. **He watches him wondering maybe he is the Son of God.** So he says, if you are, then do this. **That would prove to the devil who Jesus is,** but Jesus doesn’t want to play along with this. Not only that, **it isn’t God’s way to feed people with stones.** God’s way is for us to learn how to grow food and to become generous and share. That’s God’s way. So Jesus says, “Look, what we really need is to listen to the word of God.” That’s food.

Now all of the temptations Jesus is subjected to have one thing in common, and it’s the same for each of us as well, it is to become the center of our own lives. That is a summary of all three. In fact **all temptations are all about our being the center of life, having others serve**

**us, or our controlling them, or getting them to do what we want or what we think best, to use opportunities to our advantage, even offering help that we want to offer.**

Now all temptations actually don't come from the devil because this mentality has become so imbedded in human life, in human society. We actually don't need the devil anymore it's so well embedded, **this self-centeredness**. In fact many people think it's natural. Well it's not natural; **it may be normal in the world according to worldly standards, but it's not natural. What is natural is for us to be godly** because we have been created to be godly, so that's naturally what God wants for us.

**His first temptation was to utilize the power he had from God to satisfy his hunger.** And this is also something we all can identify with because at least if we are adults, we've all achieved some kind of control over something, over our families, business, or organizations: a certain amount of control over own lives, I presume. After all, we are not in jail; we are living out here, so we have some control. Now **power is for service**. Parents are set over their children to serve them, to help them grow up, to help them learn responsibility. It's an opportunity to work for God, to bring God's design to fruition. But **it's all too common for us to hear about people in some authority using power for personal gain**. It could be in government. It could be in business or sports. It could be anywhere. We hear about it all the time, so much so, we might not even realize how utterly wrong it is. Power is for service. **Living for oneself is a recipe for disaster**, and we see plenty of proof of that all around us as well. **So Jesus rightly affirms that what really feeds us and gives us substance is the word of God**. That's where we get our substance from.

**The second temptation is to believe in the world of appearances.** Again, very subtle; actually we fall for this all the time. We think **the world that appears to our senses** is real.

Well, it is to a point, but **it's not the whole of reality by any means**. Furthermore, **the devil is the father of lies** so when he says, "All this has been given to me, and I can give it to whomever I want," that's a lie. It has not been given to him, but **many people think, well, I can use whatever means I can to get what I want in this world, and that's the way the world works**. Well, that is the way the world works, but **the world works through this lie**. So Jesus later says. "What would someone benefit if he gained the entire world but lost the life within, the life of his soul?" **So we have to examine how much do we allow our own senses to betray our values, our faith? How much do we let ourselves be led into a world of false appearances, false goals, empty show, glitzy glamour?**

**The final temptation is the most subtle, the abuse of faith.** Are we supposed to trust God? Yes, certainly. But here the temptation is to put ourselves in jeopardy, **to put ourselves in harm's way, and then expect God to come to our rescue**. Naturally in life there are all kinds of tragedies, problems, accidents, misfortunes. They are opportunities for us to learn how to trust in God. They are not opportunities for God to prove to us his love or his care. And when we start expecting that kind of thing, that's the third temptation. When we expect God to pull our irons out of the fire that is the abuse of faith.

So the evangelist Luke gives us **these examples for us to think about**: How is that in my life? How does this come to me? **How is this a temptation, and how do I respond?**