

HOMILY ~ MARCH 5/6, 2022 FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

There was a 20/20 episode a number of years ago where they tested the ability of four year old children to resist temptation. They were placed in a room with two or three M&M's in front of them. They were told that if they waited for five minutes to eat the M&M's, they could have a whole bag. All of the kids really tried, but only half of them could wait the five minutes. The four year olds were fun to watch because they could not hide the struggle they were having. Hopefully as we get older, our ability to resist temptation increases; but maybe we just get better at hiding the struggle. In the words of Mae West: "To err is human, but it feels divine."

In the Gospel Reading, Jesus is tempted three times with three different types of temptations. The reading starts by saying that Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit. Being filled with the Holy Spirit and taking things to prayer is important in resisting temptation. In the first temptation, Jesus has been fasting for 40 days; and he is hungry. When we experience hunger or something like that, the temptation is just to satisfy the immediate need as quickly and simply as possible. If you are hungry, you may be tempted to drive through a fast food restaurant and order something unhealthy. It is easy, it tastes good and you are no longer hungry. If you do this once in a while, it is probably no big deal. But if you do it regularly, it becomes a habit. It does not happen right away, but eventually you will gain weight, clog your arteries and develop high blood pressure or diabetes. So we need to resist the temptation to quickly satisfy our hunger and make a healthier choice. It is kind of the slippery slope, not so bad at first, but then becomes a problem. Another example of this is social media and the internet. You sign on to Facebook to see pictures of your grandchildren, and three hours later you are still on. The goal of the social media sites is to keep you on social media as long as possible. They keep track of the sites you go to and how long you spend on them, and they send you more of the same to keep you hooked. When you Google something, they keep track of where you go; and they keep directing you to more of the same. On many of the sites, we have no idea how accurate the information is. You may be getting medical advice from a doctor, but what you may not know is that the doctor has a PhD in English. Many of us were trying to limit technology and the time our children spent with technology, and during COVID we were all forced to increase our time on technology. We have to resist the temptation to waste inordinate amounts of time on social media and the internet.

In the second temptation, the devil tells Jesus that he will give him all the kingdoms of the world in an instant if Jesus would worship him. This is an empty promise because they are not the devil's to give. This temptation involves empty promises. An example of this is the advertising industry that spends billions of dollars trying to convince us that we need things that we do not even want. We can get caught up in the "if only's." If only I had a new car, if only I had nicer clothes, if only I had a new phone, whatever it may be, I would be happy. You may be happy momentarily, but then you just go on to the next "if only." Empty promises and material possessions will never make you truly happy. Another example is doing something not quite right or clearly immoral to get something else. "If you want to get promoted, you have to go along." If you have to do something not quite right or clearly immoral to get promoted, you probably will not be very satisfied in the position. I have never been sorry for doing the right thing, even if it makes life more difficult.

In the third temptation, the devil tells Jesus to throw himself off the top of the temple so the angels will come and rescue him. This is the temptation of risky behavior. An example of this is what happens in Las Vegas stays in Las Vegas. Really? If you cheat on your spouse in Las Vegas, you will be bringing the guilt home with you along with maybe something you did not plan for like an STD. If you gamble away the house payment, you will be leaving your money behind; but you will be bringing the consequences home with you. We may think that risky behavior is confined to the young and the foolish, that is not always true. As we get older, we decline and there are things we just should not be doing anymore. There was a woman in her 70's that was ice skating for the first time in her life, fell on the ice and broke both of her wrists. My nurse friend said: "What was she doing ice skating for the first time in her 70's?" When we ice skate, we are likely to fall. When you fall on a hard surface when you are young, you just get up and continue to skate. When you fall in your 70's, you are likely to break something. When we get old, we should not worry so much about getting a disease. We need to be concerned about falling. In older people, that is frequently the beginning of the end. As we get older, we need to accept the things we cannot do and focus upon the things we still can do. And if we take all of these temptations to prayer, God will help us to resist them.

Love & Peace,
Fr. Jim