

The little temptations of life are things that you and I can handle quite well. It is a small thing for most of us to overcome the temptations of the refrigerator. But what if you had gone without food for 40 days? Food would look preeettttyyy good.

Jesus had been in the wilderness for 40 days and he was hungry. You can let your imagination roam in this text. I imagine something out of a Cecil B. DeMill movie. Jesus nearing the end of his 40 day fast and coming upon an oasis in the desert. There he meets the devil, not with horns and a tail but the devil dressed in the colorful robes of a desert sheik, seated on Persian rugs scattered on the ground in front of a colorful tent in the midst of a verdant oasis. A cool breeze flows through the palm trees, water gurgles over rocks, exotic servants dressed in silk robes with lots of jewelry stand waiting to serve the finest meal on earth, fruit, meats, bread, wine. Jesus, hungry and weak from his fast encounters the great tempter and the battle begins. The devil was an angel who God cast out of heaven. The devil knew Jesus before the incarnation. But now Jesus has become man and the devil may have said "You look good in human flesh, Jesus. You must be hungry." The devil begins his temptations with the care of the self.

"You must be hungry, Jesus", he says solicitously. "Come, sit, eat, enjoy. Whatever you desire I can supply" and like a maitre d' he claps his hands and the attendants appear. The devil wishes to appeal to human vanity and so he says, "Would you be so kind as to show my staff here a small example of your miraculous power...something simple, let me see...Ah, I have it...why don't you turn these stones into bread. That would be an awesome display of your power." Forty days without food.....bread, soft, warm,.... bread would taste sooooo good.

Food and drink are the first category in the hierarchy of human needs and right behind those needs are the needs to be recognized, honored, appreciated, even worshipped. But hidden in the hunger for soft bread and the desire to be revered is the cold steel hook of temptation. "IF YOU ARE THE SON OF GOD, prove it! Turn these stones into bread." The temptation for Jesus was to eat, yes, but more than that it was to doubt his connection with God. He had just come from his baptism in the Jordan where the voice of God came from heaven and said, "**This is my beloved Son...**" Now the tempter wants to create doubt in Jesus. To create doubt about God's word and promises and to drive a wedge between Jesus and his Heavenly Father. Does Jesus trust God with his life? Will God really take care of Jesus?

We also face temptations which are focused on "taking care of self". How many times have you heard or thought "You need to take care of yourself....pamper yourself, you deserve it". Care of self has its place, it is certainly better to take care of ourselves than to

abuse our bodies. But what we are tempted to do is to take such good care of ourselves that it becomes an obsession and the total focus of life. We buy products that we believe will enhance our self, our looks, or our self-esteem. We buy everything from clothes to cars to vacations based upon how these "things" will improve our lives. And once we have them we realize that they don't hold the answer to life after all. Illus. Our daughter worked at Nordstroms just out of college and she tells a great story about a perfume representative giving her a pitch on how to sell a brand of perfume. She said, "Tell the customer that this perfume will make her more self-confident, more alluring, more cosmopolitan. Jen said that it all sounded okay until the rep added, "And wearing this perfume will make you a better person." Jen said, "At this point I said, "I don't think so." Yet this is how temptation works. "You can be more popular, more successful, more prosperous, more fit, more desirable, just take care of yourself.

Jesus answered the tempter with the word of God, **"It is written, Man does not live by bread alone"**. We cannot stop the temptations to take care of the self for we are naturally self-absorbed. It is part of our human nature. We cannot keep ourselves from being tempted by our own selfish nature. If we are honest we know that life is more than things we accumulate and that the good life is found in being other focused instead of self focused. We also do not live by bread alone, or by looks alone, or by the pampered life. Character is not attained by always taking the easy road in life. Scripture helps us to see the meaning of life is not found in dying with the most toys but rather the true meaning of life is found in using the gifts of God wisely and being good stewards of life.

The temptations of the self move next to "The Temptations of the World". The devil then took Jesus to a high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, **"To you I will give their glory and all this authority, for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours."**

We see here that the devil lies. This should not surprise us for scripture calls him **"the father of lies"**. The world has not been given over to him. One of the church's favorite hymns says it well, "This is my Father's world." God is in control, not the devil. Yet at times it seems that evil is stronger than righteousness, the darkness is overcoming the light, the bad is stronger than the good. And then we are tempted to succumb to the world's values, to go along and not fight the darkness. And the values of the world lead to a dog-eat-dog jungle existence where to do the right thing is seen as being naive. And we are tempted to buy into the world's values, to fight to get on top, to be in control, to be great, to make a name for yourself, to have power, to dominate others, to "do unto others before they do unto you." This is the category of temptation that has potential for doing great harm. Temptations to power, to control and dominate others, is more dangerous

because it affects other people. Like a stone dropped into a quiet pond the implications of sin move outward to affect other people in the world. The temptations of worldly values are seductive. To make ones self the center of the world and to expect the world and everyone in it to take care of you is strong temptation.

Again, Jesus handles the devil masterfully. He says, **"It is written, Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him."** We are not the center of the world, God is. We are not to worship ourselves or the things of the world but God alone. Again, Jesus uses scripture to defend himself from the temptations of the evil one. His acquaintance with scripture is his shield. Jesus said, **"It is written, Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him."** Scripture is our shield also, as St. Paul said in Eph. 6:10ff, **"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12 For our* struggle is not against enemies of flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. 14 Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. 15 As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. 16 With all of these,* take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."**

Then the devil took Jesus to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, **"If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you," and "On their hands they will bear you up. so that you will not dash your foot against a stone."** This is the temptation to glory, to rely on yourself, no need for a cross and death. And the devil knows scripture also and uses it against Jesus!!

And again Jesus handles the tempter masterfully. Jesus is the only one who kept the First Commandment. Jesus, who more than any other, could have stood on his "self-concept" his "track record", his "accomplishments" said, **"It is written, You shall worship the Lord your God and serve only him."** Jesus does not rely on a high self-concept, or strong moral character or his record of achievement but on faith alone. It is FAITH solidly based upon the WORD of God.

Martin Luther said, **"there are three kinds of temptations...the temptations of the devil, the world, and our sinful self."** "The devil smells faith" and when faith is at stake then the devil himself takes up the tempting. We cannot keep the devil from tempting us. And

temptation by itself is not sin. But when we do give in to temptation and sin then we need to remember these strong words from a disciple of Jesus who said (I John 2:1-2 "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; 2 and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world." What enables us to resist temptation is faith and a firm trust in the word and promises of God. And when you do give in to temptation and to sin then remember that God sent Jesus to be your savior, to free you from the death which is the penalty for sin. It is in Jesus only that you have hope, for in Jesus your sins are forgiven. Thanks be to God.
AMEN