

## HOMILY

### *The First Sunday of Lent* *February 10, 2008*

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We are surrounded by temptations on every side.

- ◆ On a tight budget or watching your weight? “Dollar menus” at fast food joints tempt us to binge on a pile of cheap, fatty, over-processed food.
- ◆ The beauty of the internet? It contains everything. At the touch of a button, good information is available.
- ◆ The curse of the internet? It contains everything. At the touch of a button, here is an endless supply of garbage, gossip, pornography, violence and hate.
- ◆ Cell phones keep us in touch no matter where we are.
- ◆ Yet cell phones tempt us to never be anywhere except on the phone.
- ◆ A first car gives its driver freedom, responsibility and great possibilities.
- ◆ But a first car also tempts a young driver to head to the mall instead of to Youth Group, to drive too fast, to show off at the wheel.

You can come up with your own candidates for proof of how our culture is packed with options that are both possibilities and pitfalls. The season of Lent is supposed to be a time of serious spiritual searching and renewal. It is a time for self-scrutiny and re-dedication to a life of service and, if need be, suffering in the cause of the Kingdom. It is a time of preparation for the Passion of Christ.

How, then, has it become a time to give up chocolate or hamburgers or video games? What have we done?

The temptation or “tests” that the Devil flung at Jesus after his forty-day fast in the wilderness weren’t just challenges to **DO** something he wasn’t supposed to do; they were challenges tempting Jesus to **BE** someone he was not born to be. Did you catch that difference? The ultimate temptations in life are not those that push you to **DO** things you aren’t supposed to do, but to **BE** the person you weren’t meant to be.

- ▶ The Devil wasn’t tempting Jesus to take the edge off his hunger by turning stones into bread. He was tempting the Son of God to replace his daily relationship with God with fast food.
- ▶ The Devil wasn’t tempting Jesus to jump off the Temple roof. He was tempting the Son of God to demand God take action on the Son’s desires and preferences.
- ▶ The Devil wasn’t tempting Jesus with the power and prestige offered by the kingdoms of the world. He was tempting the Son of God to intentionally orphan himself from the Father.

Have you ever considered how stacked the deck was against the Devil succeeding in his temptations? For forty days and forty nights Jesus had been in communion with his Father in ways we cannot imagine. He may have been famished, but his spirit was strong. After forty days and forty nights, Jesus was more truly himself than he had ever been before.

The Devil fails miserably not because Jesus refuses to do the things offered. The Devil fails miserably because Jesus will be no one other than his own true self...the Son of God.

The temptation to be less than you are, to be less than what God has made you to be, to be other than you were born to be, is the real temptation that underlies all other temptations in life.

Because Jesus took his identity all the way to the cross, we have the gift of a new life in Christ. God has called us to be God’s beloved. To be God’s sons and daughters, redeemed, re-dreamed, re-created, re-born.

God calls us to be this true self, to be the Body of Christ on earth, to allow Christ to live his resurrection life through us, making you and me more the original, one-of-a-kind person God created us to be.

During this season of Lent, instead of giving up some indulgence, some temptation to do something, what if we were to take on something? What if we were personally to “take on” the identity of Christ? What if we were corporately to “take on” the identity of a Christ-body community? What if, instead of “giving up” criticizing others, we “took on” the blessing of others? What if we were to resolve that every person we would encounter this Lent we would find some way to bless them with a smile, with a compliment, with some word of encouragement? What if we were to take on the mission of blessing certain people ignored by others? Or, closer to home, maybe you need to spend this Lent “taking on” your true identity?

This Lent, instead of giving up a candy bar or a café latte, let’s take on a mission. The ultimate mission of life...**BE** the person who we were meant to be.