

## HOMILY

### *The First Sunday of Lent*

March 1, 2009

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There's a story about a little boy named Bobby who desperately wanted a new bicycle. His plan was to save nickels, dimes and quarters until he finally had enough to buy a new 10-speed. Each night he asked God to help him save his money. Kneeling beside his bed, he prayed, "Dear Lord, please help me save my money for a new bike; and please, Lord, don't let the ice cream man come down the street again tomorrow."

Temptation is something with which we all struggle. All of us know what it is to enter the wilderness of temptation.

Our short Scripture reading for today recounts Jesus' encounter with Satan in the wilderness. It was not the only time Jesus would face temptation. Throughout his life and ministry, Jesus faced temptation. He was tempted to abandon the mission his Father in heaven had given him. He was tempted to go his own way. He was tempted to trust his own power. But no matter what, he was able to face temptation without failing; he was able to endure without sinning.

What can we learn from Jesus about dealing with temptation? What help can Christ give us in our battle with that power that seeks to drive us away from God?

Like Jesus, we are all tempted. It seems that the closer to God we wish to be, the more we seek to live our lives by faith, the more temptation plagues us. Jesus knew this. That's why he taught his disciples to pray, "*Led us not into temptation.*" Lord, keep me from being tested beyond my power to resist.

M. Scott Peck, the author of the book *The Road Less Traveled*, once observed that the word "evil" is "live" spelled backwards. Temptation is the Devil's way of turning things around, of leading us away from life. For when we enter into

temptation, we walk away from life; we choose behavior that is anti-life; we fall into habits that are not healthy; and we expose ourselves to influences that are anything but good, wholesome and lasting. Pray, Jesus says, that you may not enter into temptation. We snicker when the actress in the musical *Oklahoma* sings, "I'm jist a girl who cain't say no..." However, in a day and age when sinfulness is shown as everyday, acceptable behavior on TV or the internet, when lives are corrupted by the greed in society, when thousands of people, young and old, lose their lives to alcohol and drug-related deaths, it is time for us to take the power of the Devil and temptation seriously.

Temptation sneaks up on us. And, if we don't watch out, if we live dependent upon our own power alone, temptation has the power to destroy us.

When it comes to temptation, we can **not** do it alone. We need **God's** help. We need to affirm that there is One whose power to deal with the Tempter is greater than ours, One who can do battle with the Devil and triumph. For without that One with us, we are sure to fail.

The sure remedy to temptation is to be focused on Jesus, to be so filled with his power, his life and service, that there is no room for temptation.

There is a law of physics that says that a vacuum will always be filled by whatever is near it. And so it is within our hearts. They will be filled with whatever is around us.

How many people have found themselves led into heartache and patterns of unholy living simply by the friends they kept and the places they visited? How many have drifted away from God and the Church because they occupied themselves with unwholesome music, movies, television, internet, or just plain old lazy living?

The key to dealing with temptation is to allow Christ to fill your hearts. Give God room in your heart and when God fills your heart, there will be little room left for temptation. When temptation comes knocking at the door of your heart, simply answer, "Go away! This place is occupied. Go back when you came from for Christ is here."

In closing, dear friends, Lent is a time to send the Devil a message. Look around you. What kind of friends are you keeping? What kind of places do you frequent? What does your checkbook say about the way you spend your life? We have six weeks ahead of us—six weeks to say to the Devil:

**“Go away! This place is occupied.  
Go back where you came from for Christ is here.”**

