

1st Sunday Lent (C)

- Some people find it hard to believe that Jesus could be tempted.
- But as well as a divine nature, Jesus also had a human nature, prone to all the joys & heartbreaks, achievements & struggles that we all experience.
- Besides, temptation in itself is not a sin.
- The episode of the temptations is a clear indicator of the humanity of Jesus – he experienced doubt, uncertainty & fear, just as we do.
- If the gospel intended to emphasise the divinity of Jesus, none of these temptations would have been considered.
- We are told that Jesus was indeed tempted, not just pestered by the devil.
- The opportunities laid before Jesus were actually tempting to him - they challenged his resolve.
- They made Jesus question the sort of Messiah that he was to be: the all-conquering, powerful Messiah that the people expected & wanted; or the servant to the poor, marginalized & broken, who will be tortured & put to death.
- Jesus is tempted to use his power to make his task easier or to display his authority to others.
- Had he chosen to do this, surely it would have been easier to get people's attention & admiration – & that was the temptation: to take the easier path or stick to the more subtle, more personal, more difficult path.
- Did the devil actually appear to him? We don't know.
- The main thing is that his temptations were real, just as ours are, even though Satan doesn't appear to us in person. But what did his temptations mean for him?
- The first temptation was to turn stones into bread - besides the obvious meaning, the word, 'bread' is intended to mean material things in general.
- The devil was telling Jesus to use his special powers to give the people all the material things they wanted, but Jesus knew that material things by themselves will never ultimately satisfy people.
- This was the temptation to give people what they want rather than what they need - the temptation to please the crowd by giving them what will satisfy their immediate wants, when they don't know what they really need.
- We have deeper hungers & greater needs.
- What does the heart really hunger for? It's certainly more than bread.
- We too are tempted to live for material things alone.
- It's not that we deny the spiritual, but that we neglect it.
- The second temptation was to set up a political kingdom, to resort to power rather than love. Power offers an easy substitute for the hard work love can call for.
- It's easier to control people than to love them, easier to dominate & dictate to people than to become their servant. Jesus didn't come to rule but to serve.
- We are often tempted to replace love by power – to decide for people rather than consult them & work with them.

- The third temptation consisted in doing something spectacular (throwing himself off the Temple) in order to elicit faith - much as a magician might elicit belief in his craft by doing some showy stunts.
- But sensationalism redounds to one's own glory, rather than to the glory of God. Jesus refused to jump - He didn't want screaming fans; He wanted followers, people who would imitate his way of living. Faith is about relationship, not magic.
- All three temptations for Jesus come down to the same thing in the end: to put material things & his own glory first, & spiritual things & the Father second, if at all.
- How are these temptations relevant in our own lives?
- Think of any temptation in an important matter & look for this pattern:
 - 1. I want the whole world, or at least others, to change to satisfy me, or
 - 2. I want to exercise power over others, by being coercive or manipulative, or
 - 3. I want to take stupid risks & come out unscathed/unharmful, or all three!
- These are the major temptations of God's Church as a whole, & of each of us who are its members, but in Jesus we have a brother who knows what we are up against. He forgives us & raises us up when we fall.
- He enables us to obey God's word, to trust him, & to worship him alone.
- As we reflected on Ash Wednesday, our journey of Lent to Easter is both a community journey & a personal journey.
- Our first & 2nd readings today speak of the community journey, & our 2nd reading also & Gospel speak of a personal journey.
- It is within the community that we personally come to faith & are supported in that faith & gain the support to resist the temptations to evil & to hurtful choices.
- When we look at our temptations they often appear as good things, but often they have a sting in the tail which is destructive.
- We need to be alert to all the consequences of what we do & say, & learn from our experiences.
- The more we give into temptation, the more immune we become to seeing that there's anything wrong with what we are doing; we can develop habits in our living, deceiving ourselves that what we are doing is 'not that bad'.
- St Ignatius Loyola, tells us in The Spiritual Exercises that the worst temptations are greed, pride & riches - this comes as a surprise to Catholics who have been told for too long that sex is the number one temptation.
- Ignatius says that we should be wise in how we deal with temptations: name what's going on, & attend to the pattern of the temptation quickly & consistently.
- We should take great comfort from this: there's no path of temptation along which Jesus hasn't gone ahead of us to show us that we can choose life ahead of death.
- That's what Lent is always about – a yearly season where we are encouraged to keep embracing life & live it to the full.
- Let's reflect on how we're called to examine the priorities in our lives & reflect on the positive ways we can act to bring Christ's liberating love to the world as people of hope in the midst of the temptation to despair.