

1st Sunday of Lent

In the first temptation, the devil asked Jesus to turn rocks into bread. Jesus was fasting forty days in the desert. He could have cheated. No one would have seen it. We too are tempted to sin in private - to perform actions or hold opinions that no one else will know, but that are clearly wrong. They may take place in our home, at work, or when we drive a car. When no one knows what we are doing or who we are, we are tempted to sin. Even if no one else knows, we know, and God knows. Sinning in private makes us think less of ourselves and deprives us of the strength God gives to the upright of heart.

In the second temptation, the devil asked Jesus to throw himself down from the parapet of the temple to show that God will rescue him. We too are tempted to take risks. Sometimes we eat and drink the wrong things or in the wrong amounts. Sometimes we drive too fast or without sufficient attention. We say harmful things to people we love, thinking that they will still love us. We take risks in our relationships with others, with ourselves and with God. It may seem as though no harm is done, but we put ourselves in ever greater peril and we avoid the care we owe to others.

In the third temptation, the devil asked Jesus to covet all the kingdoms of the world. Sometimes we want more glory, more adulation, more money or more possessions. When we succumb to the sins of pride we deprive other people from taking their responsibilities, and we create relationships built more on domination than on respect.

Now, you could argue that these three temptations may also drive people toward doing what is good. When we hunger for justice, we can find solutions in private. When we take risks, we create new opportunities. When we accept responsibility, we can improve society. All this is true. But we sometimes use virtues to rationalize our sin. Eve did this in the garden with Adam. She saw that the tree was good for food, pleasing to the eyes, and desirable for gaining wisdom. All those are good motivations. But in this particular context she did what God had asked her not to do. The real poison of temptation is that it makes us think we are choosing something good when in reality we are choosing something evil.

After the chosen people created and worshiped a golden calf in the desert, Moses fasted and prayed for forty days to beg God's forgiveness. After his baptism, Jesus fasted forty days to prepare for his public ministry. My brothers and sisters, we are beginning our forty days of penance. Let us scrutinize the choices we make to find out if they really are for good or if they cause harm. Let us use this time to ask forgiveness for our sins and to prepare our lives for public ministry.