

A few years ago, Fr. Joe Moore gave a talk at a priest/deacon conference. It was on temptation. ...His main point was that when we give in to temptation, the consequences are often unexpected...To illustrate it, he told about a time he visited an 80-yr-old woman in a nursing home; ...Her name was Doris... When he got to her room, one of the aides told him Doris was off having her hair done and would be back in 20 minutes.... As he sat waiting, Fr. Joe noticed a bowl full of macadamia nuts sitting on Doris' night table... Fr Joe told us he really loved macadamia nuts, and he thought about tasting just one, ...but he was afraid that if he did, it would be hard to stop at just one, so he resisted the temptation... ...for a while,....until he couldn't resist any longer...He took a nut and put it in his mouth. . Mmm, delicious.....After a few seconds, ...he took one more,... then another and another until the bowl was completely empty...When Doris finally returned,.. Fr Joe felt so guilty that he blurted out , "I'm so sorry, Doris. I couldn't help myself. I ate every 1 of your macadamia nuts."... He expected her to be at least a little upset, but her response knocked him over,... "Oh, that's alright Fr Joe....With my dentures I can't eat those nuts anyway...That's why I sucked off all the chocolate."..I don't know if it's a true story, but Fr Joe did make his point,.... which I'll get back to later.

TEMPTATION...On the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent, we always hear the Gospel story of how Jesus fasted and prayed for 40 days in the desert, and how He was tempted by the devil...Somehow we're supposed to connect this with our own Lenten practice of fasting and prayer...Now come on, have any of us ever gone 40 days without eating?...I have trouble going 40 minutes...And what about that strange assortment of temptations Jesus faced?...Do they bear any resemblance to the ordinary temptations we face every day?... So, what are we to draw from this fantastic story of how Jesus outsmarted Satan with quotes from Script? ...Well, I think that if we look beneath the particulars of this Gospel, we will recognize in Jesus' spiritual battle with Satan - one that continued throughout his life even as he hung on the cross - the same spiritual struggle every one of us has to face every day: the temptation to be less than the child of God we were created to be – the temptation to take the easy way, rather than God's way.

Today's Gospel scene takes place right after Jesus had been baptized by John, anointed by the Holy Spirit, and heard the voice of God proclaiming, "You are my beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased." ...With those words echoing in His ears, Jesus was ready to begin His mission as the Son of God,...and He is led by the Holy Spirit into the desert to fast and to pray and to discern what that mission was to be,...what the Father's plan was for Him...It's in that desert that Jesus – starving, exhausted, in no condition to offer any resistance - was tempted to reject God's plan and to take the easy path to glory....The words of the tempter were very enticing : "Come on, Son of God, You want to rule the world, don't You?...That's why you're here, isn't it,...to proclaim a kingdom where You are king. Right? ...Well, I'll make it easy for you....Bow down and worship me, and I'll turn it all over to you...I won't get in Your way."

But, Jesus didn't give in to the temptation...He said "NO!" to taking the easy way...He knew who He was and who He belonged to...He knew the mission God was giving Him was a hard one with its rejections, its betrayals, and its suffering... If he was to save the world, it would be God's way, even if it led to the cross. ...He refused to be less than who He was – the Son of God

My friends, we have been baptized into Christ... We belong to God,... We are created in God's image. Unlike Jesus, though,...we sometimes forget who we are and to whom we belong, and that's when we fall into the temptation to be less than the child of God we were created to be, and we do things we know are wrong .. ...We know they're wrong,...yet we still do them...We're kind of stupid that way.

We all know the Ten Commandments, right?...We've all heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ proclaimed and preached over and over. ...We know how He wants us to live...Right?...Yet there are times when we don't take it seriously... Even though we know what we're doing is wrong...Even though we know we shouldn't... Even though we know we're probably going to regret it,...we still give in to temptation. We sin. ..

Why? Because temptation always makes a bad thing look real good...Satan is a master at making us believe that we'll be happier if we do the thing we shouldn't do,...than we would be if we resisted the temptation and didn't do it...and that's how it's been ever since Adam and Eve were duped into believing they would be much happier if they ate the fruit from that tree...Of course, they found out what we find out when we fall to temptation: **IT ALMOST ALWAYS ENDS UP BAD**...Oh, it might make us happier for a while, it might bring us pleasure for a while...but eventually, eventually, it bites us in the butt,...like it did Fr. Joe...Except, the consequences can be much more serious: shame, pain and suffering, damaged relationships, or worse.

And not only are we tempted to do bad, we are tempted to NOT do good...tempted to do only what's easy, ...what's convenient,...what doesn't cost us anything,...We are tempted to refuse to forgive one who has hurt us,...tempted to sit back and let others feed the hungry, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, comfort the afflicted...We are tempted to NOT show the mercy to others that God has shown to us.

Ok, so life is going to have temptations we can't avoid...The 1<sup>st</sup> Letter of Peter warns us: "*Be sober and vigilant...Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.*" (1Pet 5:8-9)...Now, being tempted isn't a sin,...but, acting on it **CAN** be sinful...I don't know about you, but when I give in to temptation, I always feel stupid and selfish... But I try to remember these two things. ...The 1<sup>st</sup> thing is, oh sure, I messed up. I sinned...But that won't make God love me any less...I only have to look at Jesus on that cross to know that...You see, Jesus loves us just as we are; He knows what we are,...but He also knows what we can be...He knows we can be better,...that we can make our life and the lives we touch better...The 2<sup>nd</sup> thing I try to remember is that when I don't have the strength and the willpower to resist temptation on my own,...I don't have to go it alone...St. Paul assures us in 1 Cor: "*God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your strength....He will provide you with the way to escape and to endure it.*"

When we are faced with temptations, Jesus will help us overcome them...if we turn to Him ...There's no temptation we can't handle together....I like what Rev. Billy Graham says about it...He says, "We can't flee from temptation on our own strength—but God will give us the strength we need, if we will only seek it out....So, when the devil knocks,...I just send Jesus to the door!".... When the devil knocks, just send Jesus to the door!...Pretty good advice...When we are tempted to do wrong,...a good prayer to pray might be, "Dear Jesus, Satan's knocking at my door...Please go tell Him I'm not in."

You know, we don't have to wait for temptation to strike before we call on Jesus...Whenever we pray "Lead us not into temp,"...we're asking the Lord to keep us out of those situations where we might be drawn into sin...and He will...He'll warn us away from them... He'll be like that doctor who had a patient come in and tell him, "Doc, I broke my arm in two places,"...and the doc replied, "Well, stay outta them places!"...If we listen for His voice, we'll hear Jesus warning us, "Stay outta them places!"

My Friends, here's the thing...If we want to be all God created us to be,...the best thing we can do is to stay close to Jesus...have a personal relationship with Him,...because in Jesus we have

a Savior who knows what it is to wrestle with temptation,...who knows how hard it is to stay true to who we are and whose we are...So, if You don't have a close relationship with Jesus,... this Lent is a good time to get to know Him better...You can't have a relationship with someone unless you really know them...So, read and reflect on the Gospels...Do some spiritual reading. ...Pray more...Have an open line of communication with Jesus, talking to Him and listening to Him throughout your day....Let's make Jesus our constant companion as we journey through Lent toward Easter...Let's defang that roaring Lion Peter warns us about, so that it's no more of a threat to us than a little old pussycat... Let's make this Lent more than giving up M & Ms and ice cream and....macadamia nuts. ...AMEN.