

Some years ago, at a priest/deacon conference, I heard Fr. Joe Moore give a talk on temptation;...more specifically, on how giving in to temptation can lead to unexpected consequences.. To illustrate, he told about a time he visited 90-yr-old Doris - in a nursing home ...She was off having her hair done, so he waited in her room...As he sat waiting, he noticed a bowl full of macadamia nuts sitting on Doris' night table...He said he really loved macadamia nuts, and he thought about tasting just one,...but he resisted the temptation because he knew it'd be very hard for him to stop at just one...But after 10 min, he couldn't resist any longer. ...He took a nut and put it in his mouth. .bit into it... Mmm, delicious.After a few seconds, he took one more, then another and another and another until the bowl was completely empty...
...When Doris returned,.. Fr Joe had to confess: "Doris, I'm so sorry,. I couldn't help myself. I ate all of your macadamia nuts."...Her response almost knocked him over,..."Oh, that's alright Fr Joe....W 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 get his point across...Giving in to temptation has its risks.

TEMPATION: We just heard Mark's brief account of Jesus's 40 days in the desert...It was very light on details, but we know from the other Gospel writers that during those 40 days, Jesus fasted and prayed, and was tempted by Satan...This took place right after Jesus had been baptized by John the Baptist, anointed by the Holy Spirit, and had heard the voice of God proclaiming Him God's beloved Son...areight after that, the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the desert to fast and to pray, to prepare for His mission as the Son of God...There in that desert, Satan tempted Jesus to reject God's plan and to take the easy path to glory... Jesus didn't give in to Satan...He knew the mission God was giving Him was a hard one, with its rejections, its betrayals, its suffering...He said "NO!" to taking the easy way...If He was going to save the world, it would be God's way, even if it led to the cross. ...Jesus refused to be less than who He was – the Son of God

Now, is there any connection between what Jesus experienced in the desert and what goes on in our lives ? ...Have any of us ever gone 40 days without eating?...I have trouble going 40 minutes...And what about those strange temptations Jesus faced?...Are they anything like the ordinary temptations we face every day?...So, how does this Gosel connect with us?...Well, I think we can see in Jesus' spiritual battle with Satan, the same spiritual battle each of us face every day: the temptation to be less than who we are - a child of God ...The temptation to take the easy way, and not God's way.

My friends, we have been baptized into Christ...We belong to God,...We are created in God's image... younlike Jesus, though,...we often 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 that we are,...and we do things we know are wrong .. We know they're sinful,...but we still do them...We're kind of stupid that way...I know I am...

We know the 10 Commandments...We've heard the Gospel of Jesus Combination proclaimed and preached over and over. ...We know how Jesus wants us to live...Yet there are times when even though we know what we're doing is wrong,.. we know it's the opposite of what God wants of us...and we know we're going to regret it, ..., we still give in to temptation. We sin.....Why? ...Why? Beausec temptation always makes a bad thing look good...Doesn't it? ...Satan is a master at making us believe that IF WE DO IT, we'll be happier – we'll feel better – it'll feel so good... And that's how it's been since Adam and Eve in the Garden...Of course, they found out what we find out when we fall to temptation: **IT'LL ALMOST ALWAYS END UP BAD...**

Oh, it might make us happier for a while, might bring us pleasure for a while,...but eventually, eventually it will bite us in the butt, ...just like it did Fr. Joe...Except, the consequences can be much more serious: guilt, shame, pain and suffering, damaged relationships, or worse.

Right about now, if my preaching prof were here, he'd be yelling..."Enough about temptation and sin. You're supposed to preach the Good News...Where's the Good News?"...Ok, here's the Good News. The 1st Good News: being tempted is **not** a sin....There's always going to be temptations we can't avoid...The 1st Letter of Peter warns us: "*Be sober and vigilant... The devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.*" .. Satan is always on the prowl. ...But being tempted is not a sin. **Giving in** to the temptation - that's a sin.

The second Good News is that when we do surrender to a temptation - and we will - it isn't going to make God love us any less. ...We only need to look at Jesus on the cross to reassure us of that...Our God is a God of second chances. ..When we fall, God gives us the chance to get up and ask for forgiveness, promise to repent and start over again. The third Good News is that when a temptation becomes too much to handle, we don't have to handle it alone...St. Paul promises 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 conquer them...if we turn to Him ...With His help, there's no temptation that we can't overcome....I like what Rev. Billy Graham said about it...He said, "We can't flee from temptation on our own strength—but God will give us the strength we need, if we will seek it out....So, when the devil knocks,...I just send Jesus to the door!".... That's pretty good advice. ...When the devil knocks, we need to pray, "Dear Jesus, Satan's knocking at my door.Please go tell Him I'm not home."

Here's the thing...Our best weapon against temptation is to stay close to Jesus,...have a personal relationship with our Savior... who knows what it's like to wrestle with temptation...who knows how hard it is to stay true to who we are and whose we are...Satan just hates it when we have a close relationship with Jesus, because He knows that we'll call on Jesus when temptation is beating us down,...we'll lean on Jesus for the strength to fight off anything Satan throws at us...and we'll turn that "prowling, roaring lion" into a cute little pussy cat.

More Good News. We don't have to wait until we're already battling a temptation before we call on Jesus for help. ...Sometimes we need Him to help us to stay away from those places and situations where we could easily fall into sin...You know, "Lead us not into temptation."...He'll be like that old country doctor who had a patient come in and tell him, "Doc, I broke my arm in two places,"...and the old doc replied, "Well, then, stay outta them places!" ...If we stay close to Jesus, we'll hear His voice warning us, "Stay outta them places!"...We've got to stay close to Jesus

So, have I got a deal for you,... Here it is: During this Lent, forget about giving up something you like – which really isn't much of a sacrifice because you'll just replace it with more of something else you like....Instead, join with me to use these 40 days to get closer to Jesus,...to strengthen our relationship with Jesus... by reading and meditating on the Gospels,...by praying more...by staying in regular communication with Jesus, ...not with text messages or emails, ...but person to person,... talking to Him and listening to Him throughout our day,...and especially by receiving His precious Body and Blood more often...We can't get any closer to Jesus than that.

Let's make this Lent a time to really connect with Jesus.....Let's make this Lent much more than giving up M & Ms and ice cream...and macadamia nuts...Now, if you're ready to take this deal, let me hear an AMEN!