

TOOLS FOR DEALING WITH TEMPTATION

In all our lives there will be times when we all will be tempted. These temptations may be anticipated, or catch us by surprise, they may be mild or violent. They may be big or small. Often temptation can be subtle. There's the temptation to be negative; to be dismissive of others, to be bitter, to nurse grudges or just to be mediocre, to fly just below the radar—to be good enough to not get into big trouble but not willing to let the Gospel really infuse our lives with God's grace.

Temptation will come, it's not a matter of *if* but only *when* and *how*. Temptations are lies that masquerade as truth. In the first reading, Eve and then Adam, fell for the temptation. In today's Gospel, Jesus is tempted to misuse his power and authority but does not. Temptation leads us to misuse what has been entrusted to us; as misusing our freedom, as embracing a lie.

Fortunately, we have tools for dealing with temptation. I would like to focus on five.

1—Do not seek out temptation. Many problems in life are invited, certainly not all, but sometimes we place ourselves in what we call the near occasion of sin. If you don't want to fall into freezing water, don't go tap dancing on thin ice. Don't put yourself in that occasion. I keep my alarm clock on my dresser rather than my night stand because it forces me to get up and lessens the temptation to hit snooze or just go back to sleep. ven Jesus didn't seek out temptation. He was led by the Spirit. This includes the company we keep. Friends are called to lift each other up, not drag each other down. Friends help each other walk the narrow way of Christ. At times we find ourselves in situations of temptation that we didn't seek out and that's why we have other tools.

2—To ground ourselves in the Word of God and prayer. There's the example of Jesus in the gospel. He not only knew how the word of God could be used but how it could be misused. The Word of God strengthens us as does a healthy prayer life. True prayer doesn't lead away from reality but into it more deeply.

Memorizing prayers or verses can be very helpful in times of temptation—Each time we pray the *Our Father* we pray that we may be not fall into temptation.

3—To share in the Sacraments. We don't face temptations by ourselves but as part of a larger whole, as part of a community of disciples we call the Church, journey together. Here we come together to celebrate Jesus' victory over evil and death, that saving action is made present. Here we're fed with the Word of God and the Body and Blood of Christ. Here, Jesus nourishes and strengthens us with himself for the temptations we will face. Simply put, the evil one wants to keep us away from Jesus; to keep us away from the Eucharist and those temptations to forsake the Sunday Eucharist can often be subtle temptations.

4—To talk about it. Not to everyone we know but to a trusted confidant, a friend in the spiritual life and particularly in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Naming the temptation to another can help break its control over us. The evil one can be like an abusive bully who doesn't want to tell on him. When we do, the bullying can diminish. In Reconciliation we not only receive forgiveness but also are strengthened to resist temptation in the future.

5—To recognize the flip side of every temptation. On the other side of the lie of a temptation is a truth, an invitation. Every temptation to do wrong is an invitation to do good. A temptation to cheat on your taxes is an invitation to grow in honesty. A temptation to cheat on your spouse is an invitation to grow in fidelity. A temptation to gossip is an invitation to respect others.

Lent is a 40 day retreat with Jesus in the desert as we prepare to renew our baptismal commitment at Easter. Through prayer, fasting and almsgiving we seek, with God's grace, to grow in the freedom of the children of God and more deeply live lives of intentional faith. We consider Jesus' victory over temptation realizing that temptation is something we will face but that we have tools for dealing with it.

They include:

- i—To not seek out temptation**
- ii—To ground ourselves in the Word of God and prayer**
- iii—To worthily share in Sacraments, especially the Eucharist**
- iv—To talk about it in an appropriate setting, including confession**
- v—To recognize the flip side of every temptation is an invitation**

Jesus didn't buy the lie of temptation and he teaches us how to deal with temptation. With lives of intentional faith, with these tools and others, like Jesus, may we resist temptations to misuse what has been entrusted to us and instead serve God alone.