

Dear Friends,

Temptation. It's all around us. From the moment we get up in the morning, to the moment we lay our head to rest, temptations bombard us. They can be something as simple as the temptation to sleep a little bit longer or as serious as the temptation to be unfaithful. Lately, it seems that I have been battling the chocolate temptations sitting on my coffee table and in my kitchen. Whatever the case may be, and no matter how holy we might be, we all encounter temptations of some sort. What we do with them is the critical question.

The main thing to remember with regard to temptations is that they are not sinful in and of themselves. We commit sin only when we give in to temptation. If we can repudiate temptation, it builds within us a strength of character. That is why Jesus is such a model for us. When he went into the desert, the Scriptures tell us, he was tempted in every way that we are, including the temptations to accrue money, fame, and power. Yet, he scorned all of these for he knew that possessing any of them would bring only transitory benefits. Instead, he chose fidelity to His call and mission to preach the Gospel message in humility, poverty, and love. In a very real way then, His temptations in the desert helped forge His resolve to do the will of the Father.

Obviously, none of us can equal the perfection with which Jesus handled temptation. We frequently succumb to the temptations we encounter every day. I don't know of anyone who doesn't have some weakness that gets the best of them. Most everyone struggles with temptations to impatience, negative thinking, impurity, excessive alcohol, food, wasting time on the internet, leaving church early, materialism, shopping, overwork, or even excessive sleep. There is not one person who has ever lived on this planet that has ever escaped temptation.

Despite that fact, God gives us strength through our faith in Jesus Christ in order to combat the daily onslaught of these temptations. Every time we pray the "Our Father" we say, "lead us not into temptation." It is this constant appeal through prayer that enables us to be more proactive in avoiding temptation's allure.

Jesus went into the desert to commune with God. This constant communication with the Father enabled Him to face temptations head on. But notice that it was also his fasting and self-deprivation that helped Him to detach and attune himself to God. That is why the Lenten Season is like a journey into the desert. In the desert we deprive ourselves of certain things in order to hone our spiritual acuity so as to see more clearly.

I invite you to make a journey into the "spiritual desert" during this Lenten season so that you may be more attuned to God's Word and to his will for you. This Lent we are distributing digital audio recordings of the New Testament. I invite you to make a little time for yourself to listen to this CD for 30 minutes every day so that you can be attentive to God's Word. It can become a mini desert experience over the next 40 days. When we hear God's Word and let it live in our hearts, then temptations are more easily brushed aside. Give it a shot! You might be amazed at its affect in your life! God bless!

Fr. Paul