

Homily – First Sunday of Lent – Year C

Well, that time of year again. Lent is upon us. And if you didn't know that before you came here today, and you didn't notice the change from green to purple in the environment of the church and in Fr. Phil's ensemble. Then the ultimate tip off would be the Gospel we just heard. In the three-year cycle of the Lectionary, this is the only Sunday in the liturgical year that no matter what cycle we are in, Year A, B or C we always hear about the temptations of Jesus. Year A we get Matthew's version, Year B, Mark's and Year C, the version we just heard from Luke. It seems the folks who put the Lectionary together really understood that temptation is a constant in all our lives. And, you know it doesn't matter what line of work your in or what calling you are living out, temptation is there. For instance,



Once four priests were spending a couple of days at a cabin. In the evening they decided to tell each other their biggest temptation.

The first priest said, "Well, it's kind of embarrassing, but my big temptation is looking at naughty pictures. Once I even bought a copy of the Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Edition."

"My temptation is worse," said the second priest. "It's gambling. One Saturday instead of preparing my homily I went to the race track to bet on the ponies."

"Mine is worse still," said the third priest. "I sometimes can't control the urge to drink. One time I actually broke into the sacramental wine."

The fourth priest was quiet. "Brothers, I hate to say this," he said, "but my temptation is worst of all. I love to gossip - and if you guys will excuse me, I'd like to make a few phone calls!"

I have been involved in the RCIA process now for 27 years in a couple of different parishes and one of the blessings (among many) in that process is hearing what folks coming into our church notice about us and also, what questions they have for us. Invariably, questions seem to always arise about why we make the gestures that we make at mass. For those of us who are cradle Catholics, we often times don't give a second thought to the prayers we say or the movements we make or the posture we take at different times in the mass. This was brought to mind when I read this week's Second Reading where Saint Paul tells the

Romans that ***“The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart.”*** When people are attending mass for the first few times and noticing the things the community is doing that they don’t know how to do or why we are doing it, eventually, they ask. So, if I were to ask you, when Fr. Phil says, “a reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke”, and we say, “Glory to you, O Lord” and then bless our forehead, our lips and our heart, what are we doing?

We are offering a prayer that God’s word may always be in our thoughts, on our lips and in our heart. If God can grant us this gift; if we can confess with our lips and believe in our hearts, then, as Saint Paul says, we will be saved. There are several other things they ask about that I am tempted to share with you now, but I will resist.

I think most of us, if not all of us, are familiar with the feeling of being tempted. It can range from being tempted by that forbidden piece of chocolate cake that would fly in the face of the diet you have been working so hard at, or the forbidden relationship that would fly in the face of the marriage you have spent years working at. And everything in between. I don’t know about you, but my life has not been filled with giant epiphanies or monumental revelations that has made it easy to always believe and to never have doubts. My faith journey at times has been a *“now you see it, now you don’t”* kind of thing if I am being honest.

In this mindset, temptation can really take hold. And once again, its not the big things that tempt me. Its more the day-to-day choices and decisions that I make that can lead me so far away from where God is calling me to be. Maybe its piling on when other folks are speaking ill of someone who isn’t there and I just can’t resist putting in my two cents worth. Maybe its passing judgment on someone whose views are so diametrically opposed to mine that they are clearly and idiot. Maybe its going through the self-scan at the grocery store, then getting to my car in 20 below zero weather to find I forgot to scan something that was on the bottom of the cart. They are a huge store, what difference is this 3-dollar item going to make to them. It’s the small things that can add up to us becoming version of ourselves that we never wanted.

I would like to share a story with you that I think illustrates this very well:

Painting Judas and Jesus

Leonardo Da Vinci painted the Last Supper and it took seven years to complete. The figures who represented the twelve apostles and Christ himself were all painted from living persons. The first one chosen was the model for Christ himself.

Da Vinci screened hundreds of young men looking for the face and personality that would exhibit innocence and beauty, free from scars or any sign caused by sin.

Finally, a young man 19 years old was selected as the model to portray Christ. It took 6 months for Da Vinci to finish painting his lead character and for the next 6 years he would

paint eleven apostles from live models - the one person he had left to paint was Judas Iscariot

The search for the model for Judas was almost as exhausting as the search for Christ's model. Finally, word came to Da Vinci that a man had been found in a dungeon in Rome who would meet the requirements he was looking for. This man had been sentenced to die for a life of crime and murder.

Da Vinci went to Rome at once to meet this man. What he saw was a dark man with shaggy unkempt hair sprawled over his face which made him look vicious. He at last had found the perfect model. Da Vinci got special permission from the king and for months at an appointed time every day painted this character who was representing the betrayer of Jesus.

As he finished his last brush stroke, he turned to the guards and said, "I have finished, you can take him away."

As they were leading him away, the prisoner broke free and ran to Da Vinci crying and said, "Look at me. Do you not know who I am?" Da Vinci carefully looked at the man who he had been gazing at for the last six months and said: "No, I have never seen you before in my life until you were brought to me from prison."

Then, lifting his eyes toward heaven the prisoner said, "Oh God, have I fallen so low?" Then turning back to Da Vinci he said, "Look at me again for I am the same man you painted just seven years ago as the figure of Christ."

As we begin this journey through Lent, perhaps our prayer can be what we read in that second reading and what we told those RCIA candidates who had the questions: ***"God, always be in my thoughts, on my lips and in my heart, and above all lead me not into temptation."***

Mark Mahoney