

Confronting the demons of our lives- Temptations!

Struggling to make ends meet on a first-call salary, the protestant pastor was livid when he confronted his wife with the receipt for a \$250 dress she had bought. "How could you do this?!" "I was outside the store looking at the dress in the window, and then I found myself trying it on," she explained. "It was like Satan was whispering in my ear, 'You look fabulous in that dress. Buy it!'" "Well," the pastor replied, "You know how I deal with that kind of temptation. I say, 'Get behind me, Satan!'"

"I did," replied his wife, " but then he said, 'It looks fabulous from back here, too!'"

Talk about temptations! I think that we all understand what temptation is. No matter how good a person you are, how much you want to do what is right, temptations will come. None of us is too old or too young, too sophisticated or too naive, to escape the tempter. Russian novelist Dostoyevsky made the Temptation scene a centerpiece in his masterwork **THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV**. Ivan Karamazov calls the Temptation the most stupendous miracle on earth: the miracle of restraint. If he had yielded to the Temptation, Jesus would have been a very popular figure, not just with Satan but with all Israel. He would have established himself beyond dispute. Imagine for a moment --stones turned to bread to feed the hungry, a spectacular descent from the pinnacle of the Temple as the crowds gasped in amazement & awe, political appeasement as the foundation of the Kingdom program rather than righteousness & justice. He could establish his kingdom without suffering and death by crucifixion, without having to work with the stiff-necked people. According to Dostoyevsky's view, Satan offered 3 easy means of inciting belief--miracle, mystery, & authority--& Christ refused all 3. Jesus exercises the miracle of restraint.

How many times I have wished in my own personal life that I could exercise the miracle of restraint in the face of temptations. If only I could be a bit more self-disciplined! In the first week of Lent the Church presents the temptations to emphasize that temptations are real, that evil exists in our lives and in our society. It is important to recognize the area that you are tempted in. It is different for every person. You need to take an inventory of your life, be honest with yourself and say, okay, this is an area I struggle in, and this is an area I need to stay in guard.

Alex was trying to save all the pennies he could to buy a new baseball bat, but he had a real struggle. One night as he said his prayers, he fervently requested, "O Lord, please help me save my money for a baseball bat. And, God, don't let the ice cream man come down this street!"

A Spanish proverb instructs, "Be not a baker if your head be of butter."

That which keeps many people from being free is that they live in denial. When you're in denial, you:

- Refuse to acknowledge a vulnerable area of failure
- Avoid facing the facts of the situation
- Minimize the consequences of the situation

A teenager in Virginia was shocked to find a two-headed turtle behind her home. She caught the poor creature and watched as the two freakish heads did a tug-of-war over a piece of food she gave them—or it! According to scientists, two-headedness can occur in all animals, but the lifespan is typically short. The reason is that each head tends to work independently of the other, controlling its own side of the body, and therefore creating disunity, confusion, and frustration. Unless one head takes primary control, the creature will soon die from starvation and indecision.

It is similar to what an old Cherokee told his grandson about a battle that goes on inside people. He said, "My son, the battle is between two "wolves" in inside us all. One is Evil. It is anger, envy, jealousy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego. The other Good. It is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion and faith." The grandson thought for a minute and then asked his grandfather: "Which wolf wins?" The old Cherokee simply replied, "The one you feed"

Dear friend, as we begin the season of Lent, let us enter into the wilderness of prayer and discipline. Let us confront our demons or the wolves of our life. Let us stop feeding the bad Wolf. Let us feed the Good Wolf. Let us be ruthlessly honest with ourselves and open ourselves to the resources provided for us during Lent for spiritual growth, and to nurture what we've been neglecting. There is so much grace in this season.