

## Overcoming Our Temptations

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Hello friends, Fr. Patrick Gonyeau here at Corpus Christi Catholic Church in Detroit, Michigan thrilled to be on the Pray More Novenas Lenten retreat with you. You can hear more from me if you'd like at Free Mustard Seeds, a podcast I run, and encounter ministries at [www.encounterministries.us](http://www.encounterministries.us), an exciting organization, training tens of thousands of Catholics to walk in the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit.

### Temptation of Jesus in the Desert

Speaking of the Holy Spirit, we hear on this first Sunday of Lent in today's Gospel that, "Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil," chapter four verse one. And I'd like to focus with you on the temptation of Jesus in the desert, and how he shows us a blueprint for victory over temptations in our lives. The Catechism of the Catholic Church talks about this scene, this moment in the life of Jesus in paragraphs 538 through 540, like to read a line or two from paragraph 540: "*By the solemn 40 days of lent, the church unites herself each year to the mystery of Jesus in the desert.*"

The whole Lenten season is a penitential season, that just like Jesus in the desert, He shed himself of material comforts and went deep in prayer, aligning his heart and his mind with the Father. Well, that's the same for us as well. We shed material comfort, we go deep into prayer so that our heart and our mind can be synced in line, in key, with the mind of Christ. The 1st Corinthians chapter two tells us that we have as disciples of Jesus, and the Lord Himself tells us, "***I'm the vine and you're the branches and my father is the vine grower, he prunes the branches so that they bear more fruit.***" So Lent is a penitential season, a time of pruning. And at the heart of that word penitential is really repent.

When Jesus says, repent, the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Repentance in Greek, metanoia, it's to have a change of mind, a change of thought, bringing our thoughts, our desires, the way that we speak, move, and act into line with Jesus, who has really given us His own life as disciples to share. St. Paul says, "***Yet I live no longer, Christ is living in me.***" Galatians 2:20.

So let's get into the scene, the temptation of Jesus in the desert, and get strengthened by what we learn from it, what He wants us to learn from it. So how does He go there into the desert? He's led by the Holy Spirit who's setting up a showdown with the devil. And if the devil knew He's coming he'd have run the other way. While he goes there, Jesus, weak, like you and me, we experience weakness. And we hear in Philippians chapter two verses six and seven: "***Though he was in the form of God, He did not regard equality with God something to be grasped at, rather he emptied Himself taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness and found in human appearance.***"

So He goes in the weakness of human flesh, we all have times when we're exhausted, right? We all have times where temptation, you know, being a priest doing lots of

spiritual direction, hearing lots of confessions, and being human, I hear a lot that night. Nighttime can be a hard time for temptation. Because of the weakness that we experience. And Jesus, He goes in the weakness of our flesh and then put on top of it, He fast for 40 days. I mean, I have a hard time fasting for food for like a day and Jesus goes 40 days without eating, He's famished. He's weak, and just before we get into that temptation, let's remember Hebrews chapter four, verse 15: ***"We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has similarly been tempted in every way yet without sin."***

He's been similarly tempted. He took on our weakness and he went into that place where Adam and Eve fell in the Garden of Eden in chapter three in Genesis. When Eve entertained the voice and Adam is wandering Eve's passing on the message, they entertained the deceit of the devil, and they fell. Jesus goes into that place of temptation, humanity being tempted by the voice of the tempter, the father of lies. Jesus goes into that place weak, famished, and wins the victory and shows us how to win the victory.

So He goes weak, what does He have? He doesn't have a bazooka that He rolls out from behind the rocks says, "Gotcha sucker," pulls it – no. He doesn't have a take. He doesn't have even a slingshot like David who threw the rock right at Goliath his head. What He has is what we have, relationship with the Father.

Just before he went into the desert, at the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan, the Holy Spirit descends upon Him in the form of a dove, the heavens open. When you were baptized, you began your life under an open heaven. That means in an intimate relationship with God, who's loved you from the moment He thought of you, and made you his son or his daughter at the gift of your baptism. We hear the Father say over Jesus, He wants to say over you and I, sons and daughters: ***"This is my beloved Son,"*** my beloved daughter, if it's a lady listening, ***"with whom I am well pleased."***

So Jesus has a relationship with the father. He's heard his voice, he can hear the voice. This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased. So He has a relationship with the Father. He has his identity, the beloved Son of the Father. He has living faith, which he's going to show us. He's able to trust even when physiologically He doesn't feel great. Sweating blood in the garden of Gethsemane or absolutely famished in the desert after 40 days without food. And he hears the voice of the Father, he hears the voice of the Father. So his heart in the desert, and us as well in this penitential season, we get so aligned and so in tuned, that in our relationship as Jesus demonstrates, we're securing our identity, we're not going to go below our dignity as a beloved Son of beloved daughter. We have this living faith that gives us trust, even when we feel weak. And we hear the voice of the Lord, we cling to the Word of God.

## **Realities in Overcoming Temptation**

So we go into this temptation where Jesus demonstrates these key realities to overcoming temptation. And the devil and fallen angels don't have any hobbies. They just want to mess with God's beautiful creation. And we are the most precious part of his creation, made in the image and likeness of God beloved sons and daughters. But when we are walking in the power of the Holy Spirit, calling on the name of Jesus in faith, the devil is weak and fallen angels are weak. I remember a story of St. John Vianney when the devil appeared, manifested, sitting in his favorite chair and he said, "Aren't you afraid of me?" And St. John Vianney said, "No, you need to be afraid of me." And that's the truth. If the lion of Judah, God Almighty lives inside of you and I, and there's no contest between God and a creature, we should steamroll the devil repeatedly and fallen angels' temptation.

But you know, we still have this weakness in our flesh. So it is important to have key principles that we rely upon. When like Jesus in the desert or in the garden of Gethsemane physiologically, we might not feel super. So we lean in to these key principles that bring us victory in the battle. Okay, here we go: *The tempter approached* – verse three – *and said to him, If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become loaves of bread. He said in reply, "It is written, one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God."* So Jesus right there, He's dependent on the voice of God. And the trouble with Eve and Adam, is that they started to entertain that deceit, right? They started to entertain the voice of the tempter. The tempter comes and speaks to Jesus. And right away Jesus says, "No agreement, I'm not listening to you." And he makes that point by saying, "It's written, one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God. I'm not listening to you, Satan. I live by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God. When the father says it's time to eat, I'll eat. I'm not going to prove anything to you.

### **Say No to Temptation**

So, no agreement. That's a first key principle when it comes to temptations in our lives. No agreement. The moment we're aware that there's a thought that's not from God, that's tempting us – you know, St. Ignatius of Loyola would say – "a strong firm no" is what we need right away. I like to think of it honestly, as taking the head off of the snake. If I'm going to entertain temptation, and I think about it, I'm playing with the snake and at some point, that little guy can nip me. But when I'm aware that I have thoughts that aren't from the Lord, and they're tempting me, I just want to take its head off.

And 2nd Corinthians chapter 10 tells us that, that we take all thoughts captive to Christ. I like to think about that when I'm having thoughts that tempt me, I take that thought and I give it to Jesus and Jesus takes it and he just puts it right into a sacred heart, and then gives me a beautiful thought. Like, I'll give him say there's a thought of anger and resentment, like not just like a just anger but like a resentment and a bitterness towards somebody, like, "Why is that person always like that? Why do they just always have that

snarky comment to say?” I take that, I give it to Jesus, he puts it in his Sacred Heart. And then a beautiful thought. He gives me a beautiful thought in exchange. Like a time I saw somebody get healed or a time that I was enjoying worshiping the Lord or gazing at the Eucharist in adoration.

Give Him your thoughts. And maybe that will work for you, too. If you'd like to deploy the gift of your imagination under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Again and again I watched Jesus take my rotten thought, put it in His sacred heart. He can transform it and give me a beautiful thought back. It's going to him again and again and again.

But that key principle: no agreement. If you know when the tempter is giving you that temptation, no agreement, that quick, firm, no, turn to Jesus, give it to Jesus and let him give you something in exchange. *Then the devil* – verse five – *took him to the holy city and made him stand on the parapet of the temple and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, He will command his angels concerning you and with their hands, they will support you. Lest you dash your foot against a stone.”* What a daring move by the devil. Jesus in the first temptation, He quotes scripture, and He's clear that, “I'm not going to listen to you, scumbag. I'm gonna listen to my Father. Listen to my father, and cling on his word.”

And so the devil circles around this time, he tries a good ol' sword fight. The Word of God is the sword of the Spirit. “Hey, the scripture also says this, so why don't you do this?” Now, I think we've all had times where we've heard maybe somebody shared the scripture out of context. And you know that's not what the Word of God means. And so we read the scriptures. We meditate on the scriptures, to hear the voice of God. And it's important that every day that we would read the scriptures prayerfully. My favorite thing, I open the scriptures, my favorite thing to do when I read scripture is say, “Holy Spirit guide me.”

## **Ask For Guidance**

I ask the Holy Spirit to guide me so I can hear the voice of the Lord in the scriptures. If I pick it up and read it real fast like a newspaper, there's a good chance I'm not going to hear his voice. There's some good ideas that will go through my head, but God wants to have a conversation with us. I remember an old Franciscan priest who said, “It's not how much you read,” he was like 90, so I can make a voice like that. “It's not how much you read, it's how deep you taste.” Oh, father, that's good stuff. Now, the devil in the second temptation tries to sword fight and he gives Jesus this passage and basically says to Jesus, prove it. And again, Jesus demonstrates no agreement. “I'm not going to listen to your voice.”

## **A Secure Identity**

And reeling back around to these principles, how is He doing this? He's doing this in relationship, Jesus. How is He doing this? How is He just like, got his hand on the devil's head like a little kid, like, "You're not going to get to me." And I'm like – this classic of a little kid who's kind of waving his arms, and big brother's got his hand on his head, kind of like that. And how Jesus is doing this is in relationship. He's the Father's beloved Son. "I know who I am. My identity is secure. I don't have to prove, squat, to this guy." And that's so good. Our identity is secure in relationship with the Father. If you want to feel good about yourself, ask the Father how he sees you.

And so, He's in identity with the Father through relationship, He knows He's the Son. He knows how to hear the voice of God. And He's got this living faith. I'm trusting the Father moment to moment. So, He's not going jump at the temptation to prove to me what you can do because the scripture says this, and if you're this, go ahead and show me, go ahead and do it. No. This is, "I'm not gonna take the bait and prove to you anything, I don't have to. My identity is secure in the Father." And then we hear in verse seven, Jesus answered him, again, it is written, "***You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.***" Jesus isn't going to tell, "I'm not testing the Father. I don't have to. I'm in union with the Father, I'm his Son, I don't have to do that. I don't have to prove anything to you. I don't have to test my father. I already know if I jump off there, I can fly like a bird if I want."

### **The Third Temptation**

So we get into the third temptation: ***Then the devil took him up to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their magnificence. And he said to him, all these I shall give to you, if you will prostrate yourself and worship me. At this, Jesus said to him, get away Satan, it is written, "The Lord your God, shall you worship and him alone shall you serve."*** So he shows him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world and their magnificence. Now, I really think that's a powerful moment, I'm sure when the devil showed him that, he showed him a lot of beautiful, glorious stuff. I mean, can you imagine all the splendor of golden buildings and fancy architecture and amazing, all the beautiful amazing things that the power and the grandeur that could be in this world.

Could you imagine for one moment, a million people roaring for you out of affirmation praise and all that for you. There's something in us, concupiscence, our weakened flesh, that would that would find that to some degree, slightly attractive. We all want to be loved, we all want to be affirmed. We all kind of want to have power, you know? I mean, we've all had a moment where you walked into a place and perhaps you were given a preferential treatment because somebody thought you're somebody or you are related to George and you got on the list or whatever. Imagine that times a gajillion – okay a million, give it a real number – I think that's kind of what happened when the devil showed Jesus all the magnificence of the world, and tells him all this is yours.

Again, he's a liar and Jesus is like, "I own it all." But let the devil continue to lie his pants off. And all this is yours if you worship me, and that is really messed up. Worship. When Jesus says in John chapter four, ***"The hour is coming, it is now here. When true worshipers will worship God in spirit and truth. And indeed, God seek such worshipers,"*** that word is Proskuneo in the Greek and it's a beautiful intimate word. It is to bow, to prostrate out of honor and love and it also has a sense of to kiss the hand. A sense of to kiss. It's a beautiful heart to heart, intimate, full body, like, "I love you" expression.

And the thought of Jesus worshiping, giving his affection, even in such a way that He'd lay on the ground, and that you give that to Satan is just repulsive to Jesus and it's repulsive to us. And that's what Satan wants, is to be worshiped and Jesus tells him straight up, by the power of the word of God, he hears the voice of the Father, you shall worship the Lord your God alone, him alone, shall you worship. My heart is all for him, not for you. And so, in his identity, as a beloved Son, in relationship with the Father, the identity is secured, and He hears the voice of the Father. He knows, He's heard, you're my beloved son. He knows the word of God. He's heard the voice of God. He can recognize the voice of God. He knows the scriptures, He's quoting them, cutting the devil to pieces, standing on the word of God and the voice behind the word. And he's trusting in the Father. He's got living faith that helps him to trust in the Father. And he's victorious in temptation. Then He shows us, in our relationship with God, that it's key for us to continue to live in our identity, as a beloved Son or beloved daughter, and to hear the voice of the Father.

### **Read Scripture Daily**

That's why it's key: the son of the Holy Spirit wants to keep reading scripture daily, to keep hearing his voice. "Holy Spirit guide me." Keep hearing his voice. And remember, his voice isn't separate from his presence. It's good to be wrapped in his presence. And we have living faith that gives us trust. And if you feel like you're in a situation, you can't hear the voice of the Lord, just remember what He said.

Remember what He said to you before when you're reading scripture. Remember, the scripture that applies to this situation. And God is always ready to give us wisdom. Jesus said, the Holy Spirit will remind you everything I've told you. So if you're reading scripture daily, if you're in a tough situation, you can say, "Holy Spirit, what scripture do I need to remember? What principle do I need to remember for this moment?" And he's going to give it to you.

It's that weakness moment, that's key, though, when we feel weak, and we just like – temptations, right on top of us. Jesus went to that place for us. And it's in that moment where the rubber hits the road for you and I and it's grace. We're made to flourish in that moment with Jesus Christ, who would never leave us. He said in Hebrews 13: ***"I will never leave you, I will never forsake you."***

## **We Are Beloved Children of God**

So remember who you are: a beloved Son, a beloved daughter. Hear His voice, call on Him, trust in Him, and hear His voice and stand on the power of His word that gives us counsel in the moments of weakness and temptation. And we're obedient and we follow it and we, too, will vanquish the tempter again, and again, and again, and we will go from glory to glory, victory to victory, with Jesus Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life. Not only in this Lenten season where we're being purified, but every day of life as we are being purified and becoming saints of God. That's my prayer for you. And I ask that you keep me in your prayer too. God bless you, friends.