

THE QUESTION OF THE WEEK

“(Three different times) The tempter approached Jesus
and said, ‘If you are the Son of God, then...
Matthew 4: 3

Today’s gospel is all about Jesus undergoing temptation in the desert after a long period of fasting. But I think many Catholics tend to think that Jesus wasn’t really tempted because he was the Son of God. I mean, we start to think like this: “He may have been tempted but he wasn’t tempted the way I am tempted, or at least not in those areas of my life where I have a weakness for a particular sin.” I have always found the account of Jesus’ temptations full of insight and wry truths. The tempter is described as approaching Jesus. Jesus isn’t going down a bad path and then finds himself tempted. Jesus is doing something good and worthwhile. He has been praying and fasting. He has been preparing himself for the test that is coming. And Jesus knows that he is going to be put to the test. Jesus knows that the tempter always comes toward us in this life.

You and I have come to a point in our lives when we know that there is something very mysterious but true in the following statement: Our strength is our weakness. Our strength is our weakness because it is precisely where we are strong that we are vulnerable. If you are a person who is compassionate then your care for people is where you are most vulnerable. If you are highly organized then these organization skills themselves make you vulnerable to someone who challenges you in this very area. If you are courageous it is also your weakness because you can become foolhardy instead of courageous.

So it is with Jesus, the Son of God and Son of Man. Because He comes from God and knows the heart of God that very strength is his weakness. “Use your knowledge of God’s love for the poor to turn these stones into bread.” “You have the most special relationship with God of any person on earth. Call God on it to treat you differently than He treats everybody else. Throw yourself down.” “Go for the glory of the miraculous power you possess and everything will be yours.” Such lies. But such partial truths. Take the easy route. Help these poor people out, Jesus, if you care. IF you are the Son of God. Notice that each time Jesus is tempted the temptation challenges him in terms of his identity, of who he says he is. If you are the Son of God. Our temptations work like that too.

So here is the question of the week. If the Scriptures themselves speak about the very Son of God being subjected to temptation by the evil, why on earth would we ever think that the very same thing will not happen to us? And—often. Be prepared. It is Lent. It is time. Right now.