

WERE JESUS' TEMPTATIONS LIKE OURS?

Turn stones into bread. Have all the nations of the world at my disposal. Jump off the top of the Temple in Jerusalem so only God can save you. These are the three temptations Jesus underwent after his forty days of fasting in the desert. They sound strange to our ears. Those temptations which Jesus experienced seem very different from the kinds of temptations we have. The Scriptures say Jesus ate nothing during those days. Are we to take this literally or as a figure of speech that exaggerates to make a point. The Scriptures do that from time to time. In order to make a point. The meaning is that Jesus ate very sparingly and was physically hungry. He chose the path to physical hunger because it matched his path of spiritual hunger—for souls. The soul. The deepest and most spiritual reality of any person. Souls are much more important.

Allow me to translate the three temptations of Jesus into three temptations much more familiar to us. The first, stones into bread. Could Jesus do that? Yes. He had the power. So why would he do that? Well, people get hungry every day. We need food to live. He is hungry. Shouldn't Jesus use his power and gifts to take care of his own basic needs—first? But the temptation is not the use of his power. It is the misuse of his power. In God's creation stones do not become bread. Use your power to make a new creation, Jesus. No. What the Father has made is what I honor with the way I use my power.

Simple human pleasures. Food is one of the most basic. This Lent look at how you use food, when you eat and why you eat and how much you eat. What is the temptation that we experience? Use your own powers (talents, abilities, skills) to take care of yourself primarily, your own needs. That is the temptation. And each of us knows what that looks like. You know and I know how we like our food, our pleasures, our indulgences. You and I know when we give too much importance to our feelings and emotions and allow them to rule our lives. You and I know when we give into the misuse of our gifts just to serve our own desires. It is not a good thing. It is a temptation.

Second, "I will give you the power and the glory." Acclaim. Celebrity status. Popularity. Fame. Success. We like to think we would enjoy these things. We even daydream about these things. We think how much better our lives would be if we

had some of these things. It's about how other people look at us, treat us, exalt us, bestow their affection upon us. We like this and we are sometimes tempted to cater to what other people think. Or to do things because of what we think they think about us. We seek their acceptance. We strive for a particular reputation. Rather than embracing a more humble approach to life where we serve others with our power and abilities and gifts.

Third, from the heights of the Temple and that was a very grand edifice. To be up there and launch yourself off precisely because you are the Son of God and you know how much the Father loves you and protects you. So apply subtle pressure to the Father. Force his hand to save you by throwing yourself from the Temple. Instead of thinking about the Temple think of being hoisted up, nailed to a cross. In the deepest agony. Why? Because we had sinned. And because we were in the pit and could not get out. Because we had doomed ourselves. Jesus came to rescue us. It cost him everything. Even his life. In a very painful death. The temptation for him was to ask God the Father to be with him and to take him down. "My God, My God why have you forsaken me?" He cries out because we cry out. He wants to be taken down from his cross because we want to be taken down from our cross. That is often my temptation, our temptation. "Lord, take this cross away. Lord fix me. Help me. Spare me."

The Lord Jesus is truly like us. He experienced what we experience. He endured what we endure. So that he could save us from all of it. Lift us up. Restore us to real life. Heal us from all our afflictions and wounds. And then lead us into his kingdom. He does not spare us. Instead, he comes to be with us. He enters into our pain. To transform it from the inside. But He needs for you and me to allow him to enter into where we are most wounded. Only then can the deepest healing begin. So let us pray today—before the crucifix—for the grace to invite Jesus to enter where we do not let anyone else enter. And be not afraid.

May the Lord bless us today and give us his peace.