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No one is immune to temptation. We are all familiar with the strong desire to do something, especially something that may not be wise or is considered wrong. How often do we feel drawn toward choices or behaviors that can be difficult to resist, even when we know they might have negative consequences?

In today's gospel, Jesus is tempted by the devil. He is offered the **power to name (give meaning to) reality** (creating one's own reality: turn stone into bread), **to enjoy a high and well-connected position** (be flamboyant, gain respect and fame) and **to prioritize wealth** (worship Mammon). We know about temptations, don't we?

Whenever we use the **power of speech** to lie and argue ourselves out of compromising situations, or to demean people and dehumanize them instead of pursuing the truth; whenever we resort to the **power of position** to obtain favors, intimidate those around us and force our will upon others instead of building unity and prosperity for all; whenever we use our **resources** of wealth, knowledge and influence to corrupt and manipulate instead of promoting justice and peace, we yield to temptations.

Sin is the result of giving in to temptations, the satisfaction of our lust for possession and domination. Experiencing temptation is a normal part of being human. Everyone faces

situations where they're tempted by something appealing. What matters is *how* individuals respond to these feelings, learning to manage or resist them in a way that aligns with their values and goals.

In the last century, one of the most popular spiritual writers in America was a monk named Thomas Merton. “We live in a society,” Merton wrote, “whose whole policy is to excite every nerve in the human body and keep it at the highest pitch of artificial tension, to strain every human desire to the limit and to create as many new desires and synthetic passions as possible, in order to cater to them with the products of our factories and printing presses and movie studios and all the rest.”¹

The world is capable of stimulating our senses and of convincing us of the many things we need to be happy and satisfied. It is not easy for us to be cautious and critical enough to resist the allurement and attention-grabbing tactics of the world. In a capitalist society, there are professionals trained in the art of marketing and consumer behavior, and their job is to convince people of the *necessity* to have a certain product to satisfy our hunger for happiness, achieve an enviable life-style and fulfill our never-ending

¹ Thomas Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, p. 148

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aspirations. It takes discipline of the mind and of the will to walk away from temptation.

Did the devil, who didn't succeed in tempting and corrupting Jesus, need a marketing strategist? The common excuse we regularly hear is: "The devil made me do it." The devil didn't make Jesus do anything! He knew who he was and whose he was. He remained in integrity with his values and faithful to God.

The root-cause of temptation, in my opinion, are self-deception, self-absorption, self-aggrandizement, self-referencing and self-love (or narcissism). It's the over-estimation of one's ability to see clearly and truthfully without the support of community, that is experts, researchers, wise and mystical people.

When we are not aware of our way; when we lose sight of our values; when we are disconnected from God and God's creatures, it's easy to become fragmented and lost. That's when we seek wholeness in things, when we fill the emptiness in our life with pleasure, when we narcotize our conscience, when we exalt our ego and seek glory in popularity and people's approval.

That's when we settle for the temporary thirst quenchers of life: the material values of this world, the right connections,

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the proper credentials, the things on which this society places so much value.

The outcome of temptation is not simply a private matter or a momentary misstep: it is a spiritual crossroads that shapes both our hearts and our lives. When we yield to the pull of temptation, we may find ourselves burdened by regret, wounded by guilt, or facing consequences that ripple through our well-being and our relationships.

Yet, the story does not end there. If, by the grace of discipline and the support of community, we turn from temptation, we discover the gifts of inner growth, deeper self-mastery, and a renewed alignment with the higher values to which we are called. Each encounter with temptation is an invitation to reflect on our true purpose and to choose, not what is convenient, but what leads toward lasting fulfillment and integrity.

In the crucible of temptation, we are not alone: Jesus walks that path with us, and declares, “I have told you these things so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take courage; I have overcome the world.” (Jn 16:33)

Every struggle is an opportunity for transformation and grace. Let us cling to him our source for grace. Amen.

1 Corinthians 1:1-9; Psalm 40:1-11; Matthew 4:1-11

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