

First Sunday of Lent - B

You may recall that a couple of months ago there was an item in the news about Pope Francis suggesting that the Lord's prayer should be changed. Instead of saying "Lead us not into temptation" Pope Francis' recommendation was that the phrase be changed to "do not let us fall into temptation."

His reasoning was that the current translation is not a good one because God does not lead humans to sin.

The change has already been made in Italy and was just introduced in France.

I think the Pope has a point. There's really no rational reason why God would lead us into sin.

On the other hand, changing the translation will not help us come to terms with what is going on in today's Gospel, where it says that, after he was baptized, Jesus was driven by the Spirit "out into the desert, and he remained in the desert for forty days, tempted by Satan."

What are we to make of that, especially since this passage in Mark's gospel comes right after Jesus' baptism, when a voice came from the heavens and said, "You are my beloved son; with you I am well pleased?"

A couple of things come to mind that could be helpful for us to keep in mind during this Lenten season of heightened awareness of the temptations we are susceptible to, and of the call of the Gospel to trust in God alone.

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To begin to see things in their proper place, it would be important to recognize, first of all, that temptation is not sin. We forget that point sometimes. Clearly, Jesus was tempted in the desert, but he didn't give in to it. He remained sinless. If we feel tempted, but don't give in, we have not sinned.

The tougher question is, What could have been the reason for the Spirit to drive Jesus into the desert, knowing that there temptation awaits?

I think Jesus' movement into the desert was a way God had of giving him a chance to see what was lying in his future. In one sense you can say the time in the desert was a chance for Jesus to come to terms with the realities of what his mission would confront him with.

It was sort of like taking a car out on the test track, of a ship out on its shake-down cruise. It was a way of making Jesus road-worthy, or sea-worthy, because his ministry was about to begin.

I admit, I don't normally think of the temptations I face as being a part of the mission of discipleship, although I'm sure giving in to them does affect my "mission effectiveness."

Most of the time we look at temptations in a more individualistic way – giving in to them might jeopardize our chances of getting into heaven, for

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example. We don't really think about our place in the mission of Christianity that much.

For Jesus the temptations were more about giving him a chance to recognize early on what would confront him in much more urgent fashion once he had embraced his mission of proclaiming the Good News. He would have to have his wits about him.

To make the best use of our Lenten season I think we could take advantage of the opportunity to think of our Christian lives as participation in the mission of Christ. What temptations come to the front when we think about things in that fashion? Something like overeating may not be the main thing, even if it is something we struggle with on a daily basis.

The temptations that compromise our Christian mission are always going to have to do with love of God and love of neighbor. Instead of obsessing about how much we are eating we may have to face the fact of our indifference toward those in need.

Or we might have to confront our inclination to pass judgment on others while giving ourselves a free pass. Or we might have to make a connection between the amount of time and effort we put into keeping ourselves entertained while others go without even the most basic necessities.

You could see God's action of driving Jesus into the desert to be tempted as an act of love—a forewarning

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about what the mission was really about that he was going to embark on.

God gives us this time of Lent with a similar intent: to let us see clearly what's really at stake in our lives as disciples of Jesus, so we can be well prepared to stay focused on what really matters rather than get caught up in things that, as much as we wish they weren't a part of our lives, might really be secondary to the main thing: love of God and love of neighbor.