

My Brothers and Sisters,

Each year the Gospel on the First Sunday of Lent tells the story of Jesus' forty-day fast in the desert and his temptations by the devil. It is interesting that Mark's Gospel says nothing about what the specific temptations were. However, both Matthew and Luke specify three temptations.

In Scripture, an idol is a false god or the representation of a false god. For example, when Moses came down the mountain of Sinai with the Ten Commandments, he found that the people had built and were worshipping a golden calf. Today we tend to apply the word *idol* to our heroes. Unfortunately, today many of our popular heroes or idols are anything but heroes.

Three idols or false gods are found in every culture. The three temptations in Matthew's and Luke's Gospels correspond to these three idols. However, they only become idols when people make them their gods, when people put them first in their lives, when people find their meaning and happiness in them.

The devil said to Jesus, "*If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.*" In every society, in every culture, things, i.e., money and/or possessions, can become idols. People who worship money and possessions find their happiness and security in what they have. However, these people will never be satisfied because there will always be more to be had. Someone once said that we should love people and use things. People who make money and possessions their god often reverse this, loving things and using people.

The devil said to Jesus, "*I shall give you all this power and glory...if you worship me.*" The second idol of every society and culture is power. Some people find their happiness and security in power and authority over others. However, in 1887 Lord Acton wrote, "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." The desire for power and authority often gives rise to violence. Almost always, at the heart of abuse is someone's need or desire for power and control over others. Jesus, of course, taught and modeled servant leadership: "*Whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant.*" [Mark 10:43b]. He modeled servant leadership when he washed his disciples' feet.

The devil said to Jesus, "*If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here...*" The third idol of every society and culture is pleasure. I would suggest that in our culture the idolatry of pleasure is what leads to so much addiction. We have chemical addictions, such as drugs and alcohol. We also have process addictions, such as sexual addiction, thrill seeking, and risk taking. Because of the myths of invincibility and fatalism, our young people are particularly prone to thrill seeking and risk taking. One might even argue that the devil was tempting Jesus to be a risk taker or thrill seeker.

My brothers and sisters, none of these—money, possessions, power, or pleasure—are evil in themselves. They only become evil when we make them the center of our lives. I would suggest that this first week of Lent, we check out our priorities. Today's readings from Deuteronomy and Paul remind us that God alone saves and that we are saved by faith in God. We remember the first commandment of the Decalogue: "*I am the LORD your God. You shall have no other gods before me*" [Ex. 20:2a, 3] and Jesus' first great commandment: "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength*" [Mk. 12:30].