

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be pleasing to you O Lord.

A husband and wife both found themselves unemployed. Day after day they pounded the pavement to look for new jobs. Meanwhile, they pinched their pennies to stretch their funds. One evening, the man came home and he found his wife wearing a dress he'd never seen before. "Is that a new dress?" he asked.

The wife blushed and stuttered, "Yes, honey, it is. I – I – I bought it today."

"Why on earth would you buy a new dress? You know we don't have any income!"

"I know," she said, "I was downtown to apply for a job there. And I passed by the window of Sharon's Dress Shop. And there was this dress hanging in the window, and it was so cute. I thought, there's no harm in trying it on. So I went inside. I tried it on, and it fit so perfectly. It's like Satan was sitting on my shoulder, urging me to buy the dress."

Her husband said, "When that happens, you need to tell the devil, 'Satan, get behind me!'"

"That's exactly what I did!" she replied, "But then Satan said, 'You know, it looks great from back here, too!'"

Temptation. Every year during Lent, we consider the story of Jesus' temptation. It comes up every single year. There's something about this story that we need to hear. And I think the reason is because temptation is always so near. It comes to every one of us, and it never stops.

Temptation is very much a part of our lives. Jesus was tempted, too. The fact that he was tempted lets us know that he was fully human.

Last week, in Jesus' Transfiguration on the mountain, his divinity was more fully revealed. But this week, with his temptation, Jesus is shown to be fully human. He knew the pull and strain of temptation just as we do.

Luke tells us that the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness area. He was way out in the wild, away from civilization. It's out here in the isolation of the desert landscape that the story of the temptation unfolds.

Facing temptation can assist in developing our character. For one thing, it teaches us humility. Our temptations remind us that we're not better than others. We're just as vulnerable and in need of God's guidance as everyone else. Temptation reminds us that we're vulnerable. We are not

gods. We're human. We walk a humble path. Temptation can also strengthen us.

Jesus was tried by Satan in the wilderness. Jesus was faced with a much bigger question than the three temptations laid before him. At the core of all of them is the question of how he is going to address his mission and his ministry. There's a reason this period of temptation comes before Jesus launches his ministry.. Jesus needs to set his ministry's direction before he begins.

Jesus is presented with three considerations.

- The first one involves food. He has the ability to supply food without end. Not only could he end his own hunger, he could wipe out hunger everywhere. No one would ever die from starvation again. But is that what he wants his ministry to be, the next free meal?
- The second consideration involves power. Jesus could simply apply his will to the world, and it would be done. He could bend the wills of world leaders. He could end wars, he could eliminate selfishness. The world would be at peace. He could form the hearts and minds of all people into unity and brotherhood.
- The third temptation regards his personal security. Jesus could use his divine powers to create a zone of safety. Nothing bad will happen to him. No evil will ever befall him. Not even a cross.

"Fire tries iron, and temptation tries a man." The devil was trying Jesus with some very tempting alternatives. Jesus' decisions have far reaching consequences. They will affect his entire ministry.

But Jesus knows who he is. His identity is firmly grounded on the mission for which he came. He hasn't come to turn stones into bread. He's come to be the bread of life from heaven. He will give his body as bread for the world.

He hasn't come to be the absolute ruler of the world. No, he came to pour himself out. His ministry is one of service, not domination. And like a lamb, he will submit his will to that of the world's governors.

And his mission doesn't include avoiding pain. His mission came with a cross as its final destination. It's a destiny he'll agonize over. In the Garden of Gethsemane, he'll pray that if at all possible, may this cup pass from him. But his bidding thought is, "not my will, but thy will be done." The suffering of the cross is central to the fulfillment of his mission. Jesus doesn't avoid it.

Through the storm of temptation, Jesus remained anchored through his identity. He knew who he was, and he knew his purpose. He would not be moved by temptation.

Our identity anchors us, too. It's an identity we received at our baptism. That identity tells us whose we are. It tells us that we belong to God. We are God's beloved. We have been claimed by God. And neither death nor life, nor anything in all of creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.