

St. Luke ends today’s story of the temptation of Jesus in the desert noting, “when the devil finished every temptation he departed from him for a time” (Lk. 4:13). St. Matthew’s account of this scene, while recounting the three temptations, does not include this statement. I have always found St. Luke’s comment consoling. Earlier in his Gospel he noted that Jesus “advanced [in] wisdom and age and favor before God and man” (Lk. 2:52). Conversion for Jesus was not something instantaneous, like us he grew into the full living out of doing his Father’s will. It makes the person of Jesus in his human nature very relatable.

The sacred season of Lent challenges us to see conversion in our lives also as a daily process. Each day we have the opportunity to be converted, to draw closer to Christ, and to better and more fully understand our Christian responsibility to complete Jesus’s work in our world. Specifically, we need to be converted from our fascination with the same three major temptations that Jesus also faced: power, wealth, and prestige.

POWER. We live in a world where individual and collective power “talks”; it brings us leverage in life. Too often power is used against others; it is utilized to help ourselves rather than others. There is a great temptation to use power to gain access to people or to force others to do things for us. When Satan tempted Jesus with the power to change stones into bread, the Lord responded by saying that such power is inappropriate. Jesus gave all of us a certain amount of power over people and even over ideas, but when such power benefits only ourselves, then we are doing injustice to God’s plan. We need to be converted, to use our power in proper ways, willingly helping others, whether that is with some task or simply making them feel welcome.

WEALTH. Our American society today is dominated by consumerism; the more we have the more important we believe we are. This temptation is felt by all, regardless of our age or our status in life. Too often we seek new clothes with fancy designer labels, when an ordinary shirt, dress, slacks, or a pair of shoes would be more than adequate. Having things is certainly not a problem. After all, God gave us the created world for our

use. The problem is, too often we don't use the material world and its goods in ways that are helpful to all or build God's kingdom in our midst. Too often we simply accumulate things to have them, so that we can appear more important. Lent provides us with an annual opportunity to look into our closets, garages, basements, and storage sheds and understand the difference between what is needed and what is desired. A few moments of thought and sincere reflection about the plight of most of the world's people, especially in the third world, can aid us in our consideration of "how much is enough."

PRESTIGE. As persons we hunger and thirst to be noticed. We want people to know how important we are. American society is filled with people who seek, and bask, in attention. Many personalities, especially from the worlds of sports, entertainment, and business seek our attention. They want to be prestigious (even if it means acting outside of the law or hurting someone else along the way); it is the fuel that drives their lives. Christians are called to be countercultural; we must seek the less traveled road, the narrow gate, as Jesus describes it which leads to life (Mt. 7:13-14). Jesus tells us that humility is more important than prestige. "The greatest among you is the one who serves the rest" (Mt. 23:11). Christians are called to do their best because it is the right thing to do. There is no need to be rewarded for doing what is right. A job well done is its own reward.

Like the people in the first reading we come before the Lord holding our gifts: the gift of life, first of all; the gift of faith and eternal life in Christ through baptism that Paul speaks about in today's second reading; the other gifts and talents we possess: our power, wealth, prestige. How are we using them—for God and others, or selfishly hoarded for ourselves? Lent calls us again to wrestle with this temptation. But we are not alone. Jesus is with us and offers us the way to triumph over them to new or greater life in God. "Come, follow me," he invites each of us.

In responding to that invitation, in handing ourselves over to that struggle and its ultimate triumph we can take comfort and hope.