

OVERCOMING TEMPTATION

MARCH 10, 2019

In Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, we hear these words: *And You Lord are faithful and do not allow us to be tempted beyond our endurance, but along with the temptation you give us the means to withstand it.* What does it mean then when we pray God in the Lord's Prayer to *lead us not into temptation?* And does God really lead us into temptation? Or is it more likely that you and I dive head first into it having full confidence in our own ability to withstand any and all things that may come up against us? Doesn't this all too human belief effectively show us as being willing to negotiate with the devil? Is that what Jesus did? After all, he is the Son of God so you would think that if any human could parley with Satan, he could! In fact, he does not. To each of the three temptations, Jesus responds with the word of God. To that which is given by God in sacred Scripture he adds nothing. Jesus succeeds in each case by placing his confidence fully and completely in God's presence in his life.

By contrast, consider my son's first attempt at sobriety when he was but 15. Shawn had been told in rehab that he had to revolutionize the way he lived: different friends, different habits, a different daily routine, even listening to different music. Even then, he could not do any of this alone but needed to immerse himself in a variety of activities designed to teach and assist him in his efforts (e.g. attending NA meetings regularly). Shawn disagreed and felt that he could simply will

himself to avoid drugs and that that would be enough. He lasted one night and quickly relapsed, a pattern that persisted until his death 11 years later.

Shawn fell prey to that most basic of human temptations to believe that our will is autonomous from creation and even from God himself. This reflects the rather Nietzschean belief that I can obtain what I want by force of my own will alone. This is very human, all too American, and fundamentally flawed. The truth is that we cannot bring about any substantive change in our lives without the help of God and others. We are not an island unto ourselves, but have been created as part of a communion of beings bound together in love and by grace.

Notice in the earlier quotation from First Corinthians that Paul nowhere says that we can overcome all temptations alone. Rather he says that *along with the temptation God will give us the means to withstand it*. So he will do with each one of us who truly seeks to imitate Christ, thereby submitting his will and trust completely to God. To that end, our Lord gifts each one of us here today the power of his own Body and Blood; the very substance of him who gave himself completely for us on the cross, an act which Jesus could only accomplish in full obedience to the will of his Father.