

In the Name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

There's not a great deal I have in common with the Mormon Church, but I admit that I really loved one of the memes that's been flying around social media lately. It's a picture of a beautiful mountain setting. In the center of the picture is a cliff jutting from one of the mountains. There are two people sitting at the cliff's edge with their feet dangling over it. The caption for the picture is:

**When we have nothing left but God, we discover God is enough.**

**But, we still shouldn't sit on cliffs, that's just dumb.**

It reminds me of Jesus' interactions with the Tempter in Luke's version of this wilderness encounter. In essence, Jesus is telling the Tempter, "yeah, I could do this, but it's just dumb."

At the same time, the resistance of Jesus to the temptations should give us all reassurance of the divine nature of the Incarnate Son. I haven't met a person on this earth yet who is able to resist temptation when they are tired, hungry, thirsty, or in some kind of discomfort. I include myself in that description.

And, despite the television commercials to the contrary, a Snickers bar does not automatically change our demeanor or strengthen us to resist the temptation to travel our own direction and ignore what God may be calling us to, although it may help in the short term.

There seems to be in us a tendency to oppose love, health, wholeness, and peace – all the things that God wants for us. Perhaps we prefer to exercise our power in self-indulgence ways because we think it shows our strength. Perhaps we do this to hide from the fears we don't wish to reveal. Then again, maybe we give into temptation because it's just a lot more fun!

No matter our internal motivation, most temptations come down to what Jesus was facing: The ability to assuage some type of discomfort, the ability to live the way we wish to (or the way we think we deserve), and the desire for recognition and our 15 minutes (or more) of fame.

We have forty days of Lent to ponder how we are tempted and succumb to that temptation regularly.

I invite you to turn to the petitions of the Litany of Penitence on page 267 of the Book of Common Prayer in your pew racks. For those of you who were able to attend an Ash Wednesday service last week, you prayed those prayers. Did they strike you to the core? They always do for me. And, since I read them three times that day, I really got the message! It's as if the Rev. Dr. Massey Shepherd, who created these prayers, knew that we needed some specific guidance for self-examination and general confession.

- We have not loved God with everything we have and are.
- We have not cared about others – we exploit people who are different from us.
- We don't forgive each other. We don't rise to serve each other.
- We are unfaithful, prideful, hypocritical, and impatient.
- We are self-indulgent. We are envious of others. We are angry with ourselves.
- We love the goods and comforts of this world too much. We are dishonest on a daily basis.
- We neglect our prayers and fail to share our faith with others.
- We are blind to human need and suffering and indifferent to injustice and cruelty.
- We judge falsely and have uncharitable thoughts toward others.
- We waste God's gifts and pollute God's creation.

There's always the temptation when we do this litany to think "well, I don't do that one." However, if we are completely honest with ourselves, and understand that this litany is a community prayer, we do have to admit that as a member of

the human race, we are complicit in all of this. Corporate sin – it's impossible to escape. Therefore, we must own it and confess it.

Looking back on the wilderness temptation, we can learn two other things from Jesus regarding temptation.

One, it's easier to choose God when (as my social media picture says) we have nothing else but God. Jesus wasn't hampered by wealth. One of my colleagues came back from a trip to Africa. She said that the people she met there gave her things when they didn't have enough for themselves. She admitted, "my wealth keeps me from trusting God completely." How much do our affluent lives get in the way of our choosing God?

Two, Jesus knew how to use Scripture in order to oppose the Tempter who was versed in it, but chose to argue with it incorrectly. If we are to resist temptation, let alone directly oppose it, we too must make Scripture a part of our skill set. Is Bible study a part of your "taking on" this year?

Therefore, and especially for those of you who were unable to make it to Ash Wednesday, I invite you into a holy Lent. If you give something up – great! If you take something on – great! Just remember that it isn't just that you do these

things, but that you do them in order to strengthen your faith, your resolve, and your trust in God. For the tempter awaits opportune times. If Jesus wasn't exempt, neither are we.

Amen.