

Children

Exegetical Aim: Life does not consist in bread alone.

Prop: A loaf of bread, a folded shirt, and a toy model house.

Lesson: I have three things with me this morning. What are they? *(response)* These three things are each very important. **Hold up the food.** Why is food important? *(response)* What would happen if we didn't have food? *(response)* Clothes are also important. What would happen if we didn't have clothes? *(response)* And here is our home. Why is a home important? What would happen if you didn't have a home? *(response)* So, food and our clothing and our homes are very important. Without these things we wouldn't be able to live. In fact, we would die.

These are things we can see and touch. Can you name some invisible things that we need to live? *(response)* They may need help: There's something that is all around us; you can't see it but we need it in order to live. *(the air)* That's right. We need the air to breath. What are some other things? *(possible answers: light, sun, God)*

Application: Jesus said, "We can not live by bread alone; we must also live by God's Word." What do you think Jesus meant? *(response)* This is a hard question to answer but let's try and figure it out. Who buys all your **Hold up the bread** food? *(response)* Who buys all your **Hold up the shirt** clothes and shoes? *(response)* And who pays for the **Hold up the house** home you live in? *(response)* Now, there are some things your parents give to you that money can't buy. Things you can't see or touch. Can you tell me what they are? *(love, attention, support)* Who cooks the food for you? *(response)* Why does she/he do all that work? *(because she/he loves me)* Who teaches you to put on your clothes and tie your shoes? *(mom, dad)* Why do they do this? *(because they love me)*

So you need the food but you also need your mom and dad's love and guidance don't you? *(response)* I think that's what Jesus meant when he said, "You can't live by simply eating food; you need the teaching, the care, and love of God as well." Remember that things **hold up the props** are needed but remember also that the most important things—what life is really all about—is our relationship with God and our friendships with one another.

(Another idea: A House is Not a Home. What makes a house **chairs, beds, kitchen, lights** and what makes a home **love, care, patience, understanding, commitment, participation** **Conclusion:** you can live in a house but that doesn't make it a home. Our bodies are like this. We can put food in our bellies and clothes on our back but that does not give someone Life.)

I

Paul Grobman in his book *Vital Statistics* tells about incident that occurred on January 21, 1996. This incident--which might be every child's fantasy and every parent's nightmare--involved two brothers, Antony and Jerome who live in Quebec, Canada. It seems that the two boys wandered off from their backyard and went to a nearby Toys R Us, the now defunct toy store chain. While amusing themselves in the gigantic toy store Antony and Jerome slipped into a playhouse where they promptly fell asleep. When they woke up, the lights were out, and the store was closed. Well, if you were two young boys locked in a toy

store, what would you do? While about 150 adults searched for them nearby, the boys were happily playing inside the store. They were discovered by the store manager the following morning. Asked why the store alarm system didn't go off and alert the searching adults they were in the store, a Toys R Us spokesman said: "They never tried to open the doors to leave." A trail of toys and empty chip bags were proof of that. (1) No wonder they didn't try to leave. They were in paradise. Two youngsters alone in a toy store--what greater temptation could there be than that?

We all know what it is to be tempted, don't we? Even Jesus was tempted.

The first temptation was for the Lord to use his powers to take care of himself: You are hungry. Command this stone to be turned into bread. **This is the temptation we all have to use God's gifts in a selfish manner.** We give in to this temptation when we put self-gratification before love. Consider this from God's perspective. He has given us so much and merely asks us to use His gifts to draw closer to Him. Instead, we often hoard His gifts for ourselves,

In the second temptation of the Lord, Jesus is brought to a mountain top and shown all the kingdoms of the world. They would all be His if He worshiped the devil. This is the Temptation of Power. In the sad history of the world, those in power often use their authority to hurt others. Sometimes they do this to protect themselves. Sometimes they use their power simply because they can. The world is full of bullies, and not just in the schools. Our society has an abuse crisis that is affecting a large portion of our women as well as our children. How can this happen? It happens because many people feel that might makes right, that the one who can hurt the other has a right to do so. We all have to look within ourselves. All of us have a certain power over others, wives and husbands over each other, parents over children, siblings over their younger, weaker siblings, Teens and children over some of their classmates. None of us have the right to use this power to hurt. God gave us strength to pick others up, not to knock them down. The way of the world is the way of might makes right. Jesus showed a power greater than the power of the world

The final temptation of the devil was the one from the Parapet of the Temple. This parapet was the extension of the roof of the Temple over its wall. It must have been a scary place to stand, even if you are not afraid of heights. The Lord may have had the feeling most of us have when we are at the observation window of a skyscraper, or the edge of a steep cliff. He might have been afraid that he might fall. Scary. On the parapet, the devil told Jesus to throw himself down and see if His Father will save Him. The devil even quoted scripture saying that God would send His angels to save him. The devil tempted the Lord to force His Father to go into action. Doing this would show that he was more powerful than the Father. None of us stand on parapets and tempt God to save us. Or do we? We often are tempted that if we do something terrible and fall, God will save us. Well, He very well might catch us. Or He might pick up our pieces after we are splattered on the ground. For example, a person may be living a very sinful life when he or she receives a grace to turn from sin and turn to the Lord. That is God catching us. Or the person might be living a sinful life and then bottom out, having destroyed himself and all the others around him. Many prisoners turn to the Lord with the faith that He will put them back together again. That is God picking up the pieces of the prisoner's life.

This obviously frustrated the devil. Luke tells us, "When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time." Notice that Luke doesn't say that the devil quit tempting Jesus. He says that the devil made a strategic retreat--to tempt him at a more opportune time--for example, in the Garden of Gethsemane when he was tempted to forsake his mission.

All of us know what it is to be tempted. Some of us probably know it better than others. Temptation is part and parcel of the human condition.

Somewhere I read about a young woman in Colorado a few years back who had herself sent to jail in order to avoid being tempted. Her situation was a little different than most, however. Her temptation was to get married. This young woman asked a juvenile judge to place her in jail in order to prevent her wedding from taking place--a wedding that was scheduled later in the month. She was only 17 at the time and was in love with an older man. She knew that it was not in her best interest to marry him, but she also knew she

man. She knew that it was not in her best interest to marry him, but she also knew she couldn't resist him when she was in his presence. Jail seemed to be the only answer. We don't know what happened to her after she was released from jail. We can only hope that she made a wise decision. We do know, though, what it is to be tempted.

Jesus knew what it was to be tempted. Jesus also knew how to deal with temptation. Jesus was aware of the powerful connection between thought and deed. In that beautiful prayer that he taught his disciples to pray, which we call The Lord's Prayer, we find the words, "lead us not into temptation . . ." (Matthew 6:13a). Have you ever wondered what Jesus meant by that? Surely God would not lead us into temptation! Pope Francis thinks a better translation is "Do not let us fall into temptation."

That's a hard prayer for some people to pray. Let's face it. Some people really enjoy being tempted. Several years ago there was a popular country song by singer Lari White, the chorus of which went like this:

"Lead me not into temptation, I already know the road all too well;
Lead me not into temptation, I can find it all by myself."

The woman in the song sings, "Lead me not into temptation," but by the time you get to the end of the song it is clear that temptation is clearly what she is seeking.

Contrast that with the idea of being so earnest in our devotion to Christ that we pray passionately, "Please, Lord, keep me from even being tempted."

In Matthew 6 we read those thought-provoking words from our Lord, "You have heard it was said, you shall not commit adultery. But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

I believe that we miss the point if we try to make this into an example of unattainable perfectionism. Rather it is a recognition on Jesus' part of a truth about human nature--the deed begins with the thought.

A young married woman sits in her pastor's office. She describes to him a marriage gone stale, a husband with misplaced priorities, a situation in which she has excessive time on her hands and a longing for romance in her heart. "Yesterday I had lunch with a fellow I almost married," she confesses. "I hadn't seen him in years. Did I do wrong?" Of course there is nothing wrong with a simple lunch with an old friend--or is there? Certainly there is danger.

Someone once said that opportunity knocks only once but temptation bangs on your door for years. Jesus knew the power of temptation over the human soul. Listen as he instructs his disciples on the night that he is betrayed. Luke writes, "And he came out, and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. And when he came to the place he said to them, 'Pray that you may not enter into temptation'" (Luke 22:39-40). Notice that linkage--prayer and temptation.

What follows is a description of Jesus' own battle with the tempter. It is here he prays, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me . . ." (v. 42). The description of his struggle in Luke's gospel indicates that this prayer was no mere formality. "And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground" (v. 44). He knew what it was to battle temptation. His humanity was engaged in a great contest with his divinely appointed task.

It is interesting, though, when he returns to his disciples and finds them sleeping he wakes them and instructs them once more: "Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation." Once more he links prayer and temptation (v. 46).

II

Robert Louis Stevenson once wrote an unforgettable story about a Dr. Jekyll and a Mr. Hyde. Most of you know the story well. Dr. Henry Jekyll was respected in his community--a gentleman in every respect. But Dr. Jekyll had some secret vices which he kept carefully hidden from public view. Thus Dr. Jekyll had a dilemma faced by some people today--he wanted to maintain his reputation in the community, but be free to practice the vices that he knew would be repulsive to his neighbors.

So Dr. Jekyll hatched a plan. Late at night in his laboratory he devised a mystical potion that would allow him to transform his physical features at will. In other words, after he

drank this potion, he became a different person altogether. Thus he was able to move around town and practice his unsavory vices without his neighbors knowing anything about it. During the day, he was the amiable Dr. Jekyll, a credit to his community. At night he was transformed into a sociopathic monster called Mr. Hyde caring for no one at all and wreaking havoc everywhere he went.

Initially, Dr. Jekyll was able to control these transformations, but such unrestrained evil could not be kept in check for long. One night in his sleep, without any intent on his part, he was transformed into the infamous Mr. Hyde. Even worse, the evil monster within began dominating his life and eventually took over completely. Dr. Jekyll disappeared completely; only Mr. Hyde was left.

Stevenson's point was that there is a battle going on within each of us. Each of us carries around within us a little of Mr. Hyde and if we do not pay constant attention to our character, we too, can be dominated by our lesser selves.

But why should this be? St. Paul tells us that it is because we are descendants of Adam. Our Puritan forefathers were taught, "Through Adam's fall we sinned all." That was St. Paul's conclusion. Through one man, says St. Paul, sin came into the world. You know the story of Adam. It's found in the first few chapters of Genesis. Adam defied the commandment of God. The consequences of that act of rebellion were not only tragic, but they extended far beyond Adam himself.

It is interesting that the first thing the Bible says about Adam's son Seth is that he was made "in the image and the likeness" of his father (Gen. 5:3). So has it been ever since. We are all created in the image and likeness of the first man. There is within each of us a spirit of disobedience and rebelliousness. We want to go our own way and do our own thing without regard to our responsibilities to others or to God. The proper name of this spirit of disobedience is sin.

St. Paul wants us to know that the primary problem in human life is sin. That truth is at the very heart of our understanding of the relationship between God and humanity. More than any religion, the Judeo-Christian faith is concerned with ethics and morality. This is why the Gospel's were written. They were not to teach the story of Jesus' life but rather teach people how to live. Part of being in a right relationship with God is to seek always to do the right thing. Deep in our hearts we know that. That is why we feel guilt when we do something we know is wrong.

How do you please God? You do it by obeying His laws. God is a holy God who desires holiness, righteousness and, most importantly, love on the part of his children. BC What did God make you? .

"But how can I always do the right thing?" you may ask, "I'm only human." Yes, and our humanness can be a real problem.

Many of us are prone to chuckle at the idea of sin today. An old story tells about a man who was visiting a strange town. He stopped at a telephone booth to call his motel. In the booth he saw a sticker that said, "If you are tired of sin, read John 3:16."

Some wayward scribe had written in below the sticker, "If you are not tired of sin call Klondike 3-3344."

We chuckle at that ancient joke, but the truth of the matter is that the more we know about life and people the more acutely aware we are of how great a price is often paid because of moral and ethical weaknesses.

Many years ago a large fishing boat sprung a leak. Bringing it in for repairs, the owners discovered a hammer that had been left in the bottom of the boat years before by the builders. The constant motion of the ship had caused the hammer to beat against the insides of the boat until it had worn away the wood and the metal and caused the leak that nearly sank the ship.

You may be surprised to know that a similar incident occurred in September 1978 on board a nuclear submarine. A worker accidentally dropped a 50¢ paint scraper into a torpedo launcher of the U.S. nuclear submarine Swordfish, which jammed the loading piston. Since the submarine was still at sea, divers worked for a week attempting to free the piston, without success. Ultimately, the submarine had to be put in dry dock, where repairs ended up costing \$171,000. (1)

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Both of these were minor incidents. A hammer accidentally dropped into a wooden man. A paint scraper accidentally dropped into a torpedo launcher. The Catholic heresy of it is only a venial sin. Many Catholics seem to feel if it is not a mortal sin, its not serious. Look at this way, if a married man tells his wife every day that she's put on weight. How long is she going to put up with it. It's a matter of time and what it does to the relationship. Yet both led to serious unanticipated complications. Unresolved sin and guilt are often like that. A small act unconfessed can lead to serious heartache and pain later in life. It doesn't seem fair but we can spend a lifetime paying for a foolish, youthful mistake.

C. Roy Angell once gave a somewhat whimsical example of this hard truth. He told about a farm boy who was angry at a neighboring farmer who had hurt his feelings. The boy tried to think of some way he could get even. The plan he arrived upon was this: Early one morning he rode twenty miles on horseback to purchase a bag of seed-- Johnson grass seed. After dark he sowed his neighbor's richest bottom land with Johnson grass. As you may know, Johnson grass has traditionally been a pest, and it is nearly indestructible. So the Johnson grass came up, and the neighboring farmer fought Johnson grass until the day he died. The young man had his revenge.

In the meantime, however, the young fellow grew up and fell in love with the farmer's daughter. They were married, and when the farmer died he left the farm to his daughter. The young fellow who went to such great trouble to hurt his neighbor years before spent the rest of his life fighting Johnson grass too.

Usually the penalty for our sins is not that obvious. Still, the moral is valid. We can pay a lifetime for a foolish and sometimes petty act of moral impropriety. (2)

St. Paul's says that our hope is in Christ. **There is a second Adam, says St. Paul, and that second Adam is Jesus Christ.** The first Adam brought death and destruction through his disobedience. In stunning contrast, the second Adam humbled himself, submitted to the will of his Father and provided for us the means of salvation.

Matthew gives us that unforgettable picture of Satan taking Jesus to the pinnacle of the Temple at Jerusalem. There Satan tempted Jesus to use earthly fame and glory to establish His kingdom.

Later Satan took Jesus to a high mountain where he could behold all the kingdoms of the world. All of this would be his, Satan declares, if he bowed down him. The first temptation of turning stones into bread was that of being selfish and using power for his own benefit. The second is power. In the third showing that the Devil himself can quote scripture is pride. Jesus was not selfish, and even though his is all powerful, he did not seek power and he wanted the world to freely bow before him not because they had no choice, which Satan promised.

The greatest temptation of all, however, came later in a garden called Gethsemane where Jesus prayed, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me."

Each time Jesus was tempted, he submitted his own will to the will of the Father. And the impact was this: Just as each of us share in the consequences of Adam's sin, so each of us share in the benefits of Christ's obedience. "For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners," St. Paul writes, "so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous." That one man, of course, is Jesus Christ.

Only Christ can free us from the power of sin! That is the first thing we learn from today's lessons. Personal discipline is helpful, but there are many disciplined persons who are still captive to their sins. Good intentions are a starting point, but there is much time-proven truth in the adage that good intentions are the paving material for the road that leads to hell. There is a flaw in the fabric of human character that only God can mend. There is only one way that we shall ever be free from the sin that does so easily beset us, and that is to open ourselves to God's grace, His forgiveness, His love. Only by looking to the new Adam can we escape the curse of the old one.

There is nothing that any of us can do on our own to free ourselves from the power of sin at work in our lives. Positive thinking won't do it. Personal discipline will not do it. Christ is our only hope.

This is to say that we are set free from the power of sin when we accept God's gift

of grace which comes to us through Jesus Christ. I know that we don't like to think in theological terms, and freedom from sin may not turn us on. But this is painfully relevant to our lives--more relevant than we suppose. Many of us are wracked with guilt. Some of us are entangled by destructive habits and practices like addictions to drugs and lust. Some of us are endangering our health and our relations with our families. We've tried self-help programs, we've read magazine testimonies from people who've wrestled with the same demons, but we haven't been able to create a strategy for coping with these self-destructive forces that have us in their grip. Our only hope is to turn to Christ. Only his grace will give us what we need to make a new start.

Maybe a simple story will help us understand our situation: A French writer named Henri Barbusse was in a trench full of wounded men during the First World War. While in that trench he overheard a conversation.

One man in the trench was dying and knew it. He only had minutes to live. He turned to another man and said, "Listen, Dominic, you've led a very bad life. Everywhere you are wanted by the police. But there are no convictions against me. My name is clear, so, here, take my wallet, take my papers, my identity, take my good name, my life and quickly, hand me your papers that I may carry all your crimes away with me in death." Did you catch that? This wounded man wanted his friend who had made many mistakes to be able to make a new start. So he gave him his identity--his papers, his wallet, his good name. Is there a better example of what Christ seeks to do for us? All we have to do is turn to him and accept his amazing grace.

And that brings us to the final way we are set free from the power of sin: that is to humble ourselves following the example of Christ and seek to live a new life by his grace. This does not mean that we arrive at a state of perfection. In this life we never escape completely the nature of Adam. But we do seek by his grace to be conformed to the image of the new Adam, Christ himself--to have the same mind that was in Christ Jesus who humbled himself and became obedient unto God.

That is the secret to being set free from the power of sin--trust and obey. Look to Jesus and by his power live as fully as you are able according to the will of God.

There is an ancient legend that the cross of Christ stood on the same spot where the forbidden tree stood in the Garden of Eden. It is just a legend, but poet John Donne used that idea for one last poem, written upon his deathbed. It goes like this:

"We think that Paradise and Calvary, Christ's cross and Adam's tree stood in one place; Look, Lord, and find both Adams met in me; As the first Adam's sweat surrounds my face, May the last Adam's blood my soul embrace."

This was John Dunne's way of affirming that there are two natures within each of us, the first Adam, and the second, Jesus Christ. We are both dust and divinity. The central tragedy of our lives is our inability to save ourselves from our lesser nature. But the good news is this: There is one who transcended the limits of humanity, and he has made it possible for us to be free from the power of sin as well. Dr. Jekyll, meet Jesus. He can set you free from the demons that torment you. Look to Jesus, trust him and obey him, and you will be saved.

1. Leland Gregory, *Stupid History Tales of Stupidity, Strangeness, and Mythconceptions Throughout the Ages* (Kansas City: Andrews McMeel Publishing, LLC, 2007), p. 81.

2. C. Roy Angell, *Shields of Brass* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1965).

3. Peter Michelmore, *Reader's Digest*. Adapted from <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/s/salvation.htm>.

4. From a sermon by Billy D. Strayhorn

III Fr Joseph Pelegrino

This Sunday's readings begin with the account of the Fall of Man. The thought that humankind would be handed over to evil because the First Man and First Woman ate an apple or some sort of fruit certainly seems like an overreaction by God. However, look carefully at the reading. Before they turned from God, Adam and Eve were

innocent. They were told that they could eat from the abundance of the Garden of Eden with the exception of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Notice the name of the tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In the Bible to know is to experience. Mary was surprised that the angel said she would have a baby because she did not know man. Back to Adam and Eve. God did not want them to experience evil. But he also gave them a free will with the ability to choose good or evil. They were tempted by the serpent. The nature of the temptation is so important. The serpent did not tell them that the fruit tasted better than the fruit of the other trees. Nor did Adam and Eve eat the fruit because they were hungry. The serpent told them that if they ate this fruit, they would be like gods. Then they would not need God. They ate the fruit as an attempt to push God out of their lives. Their pride led them to experience evil. Once they ate the fruit, they were no longer innocent. They were no longer like that toddler who runs around the house in his or her birthday suit. They experienced sin, and with it shame.

The essence of evil is a turning from God. St. Augustine speaks about it as a flight to nothingness. For God is the source of all that is. Evil perverts His Creation so that instead of the good things He creates leading us to Him, we use His gifts to run away from Him.

The *Genesis* story of the Fall is not about fruit. It is about the temptation we all have to act as though we do not need God. This is also at the heart of the three temptations the Lord endured in today's Gospel. Jesus was hungry. The devil didn't tempt him to pray to His Father to provide food. He tempted him to turn the rocks into bread, and use the power His Father had given Him for himself. We are all tempted to selfishness. We are tempted to hoard for ourselves the gifts the Lord has provided. The second temptation the Lord endured, throw yourself from the parapet of the Temple and expect your Father to catch you, was a temptation to show superiority to the Father, a temptation to demand that the Father go into action. We do this when we demand something from God. Sometimes we say that we pray but God does not never hears our prayers. That is wrong. God hears our prayers. Sometimes, though, He says, "No." There are times and incidents in all our lives when we have to join the old country singer, Garth Brooks, and thank God for unanswered prayers. The temptation to force God into action is seen even among some well-meaning but ill-informed people who believe that certain prayers will always produce the desired results. God is God, and we are not God, or gods.

That third temptation the Lord endured is the temptation we all have to accumulate possessions and power as though these gifts from God will make our lives happy. Jesus did not fall for this lie as He stood on that mountain top and viewed all the Kingdoms of the world, all His if only He worshiped the devil. Many people in the world worship evil if it increases their fortunes or their status in life. They even call it the way of the world. Interesting expression. The Way of the World is the Way of the Devil. Think about the dark places in our society, the places of drugs, the places of the sex industry, the places where the powerful plot to destroy the weak, plot to take advantage of those who cannot protect themselves. Those misusing their positions and their possessions happily choose evil; choose to worship the devil, so that they might increase their own wealth.

At the beginning of Lent we are summoned to take a serious look at the conduct of our lives. Are we committing the original sin of pushing God aside? Is He a low priority in our lives and therefore no priority at all? Lent calls us to examine how we are using His Gifts. Are we selfish? Do we take advantage of others? Or do we recognize our dependence on God and do whatever we can to serve His presence in others?

The number 40 is used throughout the Bible whenever the world is going to experience a major change. There were 40 days of rain in Noah's time when God gave

experience a major change. There were 40 days of rain in Noah's time when God gave man a new start. Moses went onto Mt. Sinai for 40 days and received God's Law for the people. Elijah traveled for 40 days to that same mountain, in his time called Horeb, and restored the worship of Yahweh. And Jesus spent 40 days in the desert before beginning the proclamation of the Gospel. We spend 40 days of Lent, not just to complete some tasks, not just to give up things. We spend 40 days preparing to transform our lives so that we might be an Easter People.