

- X Our readings today can overwhelm us with images:
 - ✓ The garden, the wilderness; Satan, angels; The tree of knowledge; bread, hunger; the serpent; the Spirit; nakedness, sin, and transgression.
 - It takes a lifetime of Lents to think about all the ways that these images are interconnected
 - and another lifetime to wrestle with all that is said by placing these images together.
 - Each year I understand the interplay of all these images in a different way
 - Typically I look at Matthew’s story of Jesus 40 days in the Wilderness in contrast to the story of Moses and Hebrews 40 days in the desert, and how the response of Jesus to Satan mirrors the response of Moses to the Israelites.
 - But this year I come to these images through the filter of a parable.
- X Parable of the City Council member & the Hamburger
 - ✓ There was in the city a faithful council member, who spent the afternoon reading through the documents prepared for him for that evening’s meeting. When, behold, the hour arrived for clothing himself in the proper attire and departing for the appointed gathering of the council. As he prepared to leave, the councilman thought, “This portends to be a long meeting, and by its end many hours will have passed, and I will be famished. I can prepare something wholesome and be late for the meeting, or I can go the the House of McDonald, and they will prepare something in an instant.” And it came to pass that the council member bought a non-Kosher bacon cheeseburger, brought it to the council chambers and sat in the rear to enjoy his meal. As he took his first bite, the council member from Ward 1 entered the chambers, looked upon the McDonald’s bag, and laughed in derision. Then entered into the chamber the Chief of Police, and she was a mighty warrior, who that same year had climbed Mt. Baker and in the year before had climbed Mt. Rainier. And she gazed upon the non-Kosher meal and said, “McDonalds? I haven’t eaten a McDonald’s hamburger in 22 years.” But the council member was not deterred by this condemnation. He said to himself, “It’s quick, it’s easy, I don’t have to think a lot about it, and besides, I’m only hurting myself.”
- X What is the meaning of this parable?
 - ✓ Most of the time, I live in a fast-food world, and I make fast-food choices and accept fast-food theology. I’m so tempted to choose what’s easiest that I lose sight of what God intended that I should be.

- ✗ In the same way, it appears that the first temptation of Jesus in the wilderness was the temptation of fast food.
 - ✓ [Aside: the Common English Bible points out that the Greek text is clear that the words that Satan uses are “Since you are God’s son,” not “If you God’s son.”
 - And that makes a difference:
 - Satan knows that Jesus is the son of God, and then the questions become, more than, “Prove to me that you’re God’s son.”
 - Instead we have the question: “Since you are God’s son, how will you fulfill your role as God’s son”]
 - ✓ Since you’re God’s son, says Satan, “why not turn a rock into a loaf of bread?”
 - What will it hurt? What’s the harm?
 - And what’s wrong with bread?
 - I’m sure that you’ll find bread is a the great symbol and metaphor of the Kingdom of God.
 - So why shouldn’t turning stones into bread be seen as a gift from God?
 - ✓ The harm is that, as St. Bernard of Clairvaux informed us, “the road to hell is paved with good intentions.”
 - We struggle with the attraction of doing what’s easiest.
 - We’re tempted to choose the easy way when we realize
 - how much easier it is to cut a loved one out of our lives forever rather than forgive those who have wronged us,
 - how much easier it is to find another pressing project rather than listen to the lonely
 - how much easier it is to build up our own nest-egg rather than share what we have with the poor.
 - and how easy it is to kill a prisoner of war rather than bring him back
 - and to torture someone because we know that no one on earth has the power to punish us for doing that
- ✗ The second temptation is like the first:
 - ✓ “Since you are God’s son, throw yourself down from the highest point in the temple, and the angels of God will protect you.”
 - Jesus answers by stating, “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”
 - Suddenly we have moved from the belief that God will provide the easy way out
 - To the belief that God is an emergency 911 service, someone who will do our bidding
 - ✓ How easy it is to view God as a genie in a bottle here to fulfill three wishes.
 - On so-called Christian TV, I hear of lot of “All you have to do is name it and claim it, believe it and receive it!”

- What we have then is God, in our own image, a golden calf god who promises to fulfill all our earthly wants and wishes.
- ✓ “Don’t test the Lord your God,” Jesus says.
 - Don’t expect God to be a magician on your behalf.
 - Magic is an illusion, not real,
 - for entertainment, not transformation.
 - God came to earth to work miracles in our broken world, to transform our broken world into the Kingdom of God, and that is miracle enough.
- ✗ Finally we come to the third temptation: “Worship me and I’ll give you all the kingdoms of the world.”
 - ✓ How easy is that?
 - One small act on will unlock all the success one will ever need.
 - Why does that sound like American Idol?
 - “Forget about the hard road to success. All I have to do is make it through a few rounds of a TV elimination contest; I’ll get to make the music I want, and I’ll be worshipped by millions.”
 - OK, there is the small matter of my soul being owned by the Simon Cowell music production company for a few years...but it’s a small price to pay
 - ✓ What’s at the center of this temptation?
 - It’s another in the menu of Fast-Food Theology:
 - God moves on his own time, and we need to get stuff done now.
 - We want to establish law and order, peace and justice right away and not to have to wait for God’s approval.
 - God, after all, can be a bottleneck on the flow of progress.
 - ◆ Maybe it’ll be easier if we take care of the world on our own, and then get around to doing something about God.
 - ✓ The temptation, ultimately, is to bypass God in order to do something good.
 - We hear echoes of this in T.S. Elliot’s play: Murder in the Cathedral, in which Thomas Becket, after his return to Canterbury Cathedral, is approached by four tempters...and the last is the most insidious.
 - “What you really want,” the tempter says, “is glory after death.” “Saint and martyr rule from the tomb,” and Thomas should do what has to be done to force King Henry to make a martyr of Thomas.
 - ◆ The tempter says, “Think of pilgrims, standing in line / Before the glittering jeweled shrine.”
 - Although Becket was able to easily turn away the first three temptations, this one causes a real crisis of conscience.
 - Becket asks, “Who are you, tempting me with my own desires?”

- At the end Becket understands, “The last temptation is the greatest treason: to do the right deed for the wrong reason.”
- ✗ If we look at these temptations through the lens of Fast Food theology:
- ✓ We can see tIn Fast Food Theology
 - we’re tempted to use God, rather than be used by God
 - we’re tempted to refuse God in order to have things for ourselves
 - ✓ Jesus shows us the way out of these temptations by his example in the desert.
 - He also showed his true power and Sonship by defeating the tempter through simply remaining loyal to God.
 - Remaining loyal to God isn’t simple and it isn’t fast
 - If we look at the baptismal vows that we renew four times a year, we see that remaining loyal to God is long, continuing process, in which we
 - ♦ continue in the apostle’s teaching and fellowship and in the breaking of bread and the prayers
 - ♦ persevere in resisting evil
 - ♦ proclaim by word and example
 - ♦ seek to serve Christ is all persons
 - ♦ strive for justice and peace
- ✗ In this covenant between ourselves and God,
- ✓ we see that “being” a Christian is a “doing” behavior. It is not something that we can simply be.
 - ✓ And the time of Lent gives us 40 days in which we can reflect on how we have and how we should put our Christian values into practice in political, economic and moral choices.
 - ✓ An authentic preparation for Easter is more than just a quick stop in front of the Post Office (or even in church) to get ashes on the forehead,
 - it’s a journey of faith in which God and his people become partners for life, in good days and bad,
 - together in prayer and action for a more peaceful and just world.