

The Temptations

What do the songs “The Way You Do the Things You Do,” “My Girl,” “Ain’t Too Proud to Beg,” and “Get Ready” all have in common? That’s right, they were all among the greatest hits of the group, “The Temptations.” This group provided a steady stream of hits from the early 1960s through the mid-1970s. While we are uncertain as to how they settled on that particular name (they were originally “The Primes”) we can more or less figure out the connotation of the name, “The Temptations.”

The concept of being tempted has existed in the human world probably as long as humans have inhabited the earth. Even when we observe our animals and pets, they, too, are tempted but don’t have the same reasoning ability that humans possess. Even when the stories of the first humans were depicted in the Book of Genesis, the concept of temptation was present and stated as the cause of the fall of humanity in the Garden of Eden.

Ah, the Garden of Eden, where a life of perfection was given to humankind, only to be snatched away because humans were unable to resist temptation. People sought answers to why their lives were hard, how they got clothes, and why they ate what they ate, etc. Different cultures and religions had their own stories and beliefs as to how we were started and how they existed. Some consider these stories to be just that—stories—while others (Creationists) firmly believe that this is how the world began. I am not coming down on either side, even if I have my own opinion, but I will say that the Creation story, Adam and Eve, and other pieces of the Bible are part of our Sacred Stories and Scriptures.

We accept these as we look for the meaning within the Scripture. We know from today's Genesis reading that we have always been called to resist temptation and to follow the rules set forth. In this case, it was simply not eat of what was called the "Tree of Knowledge." We are then left to see the fallout from caving to temptation and not following a simple directive.

Our Gospel reading takes it even further with Jesus facing temptation at the hands of Satan out in the wilderness or desert. In this reading, we are given examples of how to resist temptation, mostly by relying on what we have been taught about our relationship with God. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus relies on quotes from the Book of Deuteronomy to show how humans can resist temptation and fall back on their relationship with God.

On a side note, this would have made sense to the original hearers of Matthew's Gospel. As we have mentioned before, Scripture scholars believe the original audience for Matthew's Gospel were Palestinian Christian Jews. These were people who were raised Jewish but also wanted to be followers of "The Way" and the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth. The quotes from Deuteronomy would be very familiar to them and would help solidify the theme of Jesus as the fulfillment of the Promised Messiah.

As much as temptation was a reality for people two thousand years ago, it is still a reality today. We continue to be tempted by all

kinds of things. Who among us isn't tempted by food? Oh we know we shouldn't eat the whole sleeve of Oreos but we may have done so. Well, if not Oreos, then we have maybe have over-indulged in something else. We can do it with food or drink. We also have a relatively new temptation called the Internet. How many of us have found ourselves on the phone or computer as we scroll--almost as bad as "the kids"--and weave our way through a bunch of different clicks and have found our way in the middle of somewhere we "shouldn't be?"

We also face temptation with our words and our actions. We are tempted to enter discussions that are not our business or to use unkind words towards others. We are called to resist temptation. We even pray, "lead us not into temptation" whenever we pray the Lord's Prayer. While he is not our church leader, Pope Leo mentioned how we can work against the temptation to be unkind.

"Let us begin by disarming our language, avoiding harsh words and rash judgment, refraining from slander and speaking ill of those who are not present and cannot defend themselves".

"I would like to invite you to a very concrete form of abstinence [...]: abstaining from using words that affect and hurt our neighbor".

"Let us ask for the strength that comes from the type of fasting that also extends to our use of language, so that hurtful words may diminish and give way to a greater space for the voice of others"."

Some of us were raised in the tradition of practicing some sort of abstinence in Lent. Perhaps this year, we can work to abstain from temptation in all forms.