

I grew up on a farm. Both sets of my grandparents had farms with the whole range of animals. We always had a freezer full of meat in our home, and we probably ate meat at 15 or 16 of the 21 meals a week, of course not the three on Friday, and maybe one or two others in the week. I am not quite so carnivorous all these years later, but becoming a vegan would be the highest intensity of purgatory for me!

But even meat-lover that I am, I look at some of the ads for fast food restaurants, and I wonder “How could anyone eat that?” Baconator, Double Whopper or whatever. I looked online and found a chain restaurant, (not in Ohio, but in the state up north and elsewhere) that serves something called the Triplenine. That is nine hamburger patties, nine slices of cheese, lettuce and tomato stacked between two pieces of bread. It has over 2000 calories and more than 100 grams of saturated fat. The price is \$22.99. Coronary bypass surgery not included.

In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare wrote that “the devil hath the power to assume a pleasing shape.” (II,ii) I wonder if that included nine hamburger patties on a bun. And I wonder if this is anything like the devil Jesus encountered in the desert. I am sure that the temptations he offered Jesus were just as tantalizing, and designed to make his mouth water literally and figuratively.

Whatever those temptations were, they were things we would all recognize. And that is one reason why Jesus resisted them. Each year on the first Sunday of Lent, we hear the story of Jesus being tempted in the desert. This year it is from Mark, and a very abbreviated version. Matthew and Luke each give three particular temptations—really they are about hunger, power and the absence of pain, probably three of the most urgent desires anyone can have. They go to the heart of who we are.

Hunger can be more than just a craving for a cheeseburger; there is the hunger for love, or for sex, or for attention or approval. **Power** is about more than ambition or world domination or celebrity; it is also about control—not being accountable to anyone, and being able to do whatever you want, whenever you want, however you want. [Trump!] And the **absence of pain** is about more than just being protected by angels. It is also about never feeling hardship, or sickness, or sorrow.

Think of what the devil offers: total satisfaction... absolute power... complete protection and comfort and ease. That would be irresistible to many of us. But not to Jesus... And for one reason: These are all things that would have deprived him of his humanity. The Letter to the Hebrews says that “he was a man like us in all things but sin.” In saying “no” to these temptations and not giving in to them, Jesus is saying “yes” to being one with us.

He is saying: I will know what it is like to be hungry, to crave something I can’t have.

He is saying: I will know what it is like to want power, but to be powerless.

He is saying: I will know what it is to hurt, and to bleed, and to die.

And so, as his earthly ministry unfolds, he will share our hardships and frustrations, our temptations and trials. He will feel what it is like to be denied and betrayed. He will know every kind of person. He will know John, the beloved disciple, and Judas the ultimate betrayer. He will meet the woman at the well, and the adulterous woman, but Mary and Martha and Mary Magdalene as well. He will know what it is to weep at the death of a friend, Lazarus. He will know what it is to be powerless and captive, as he walks the last mile to Calvary in chains. He will know all that we know, feel all that we feel—a man like us in all things but sin.

And the gospels don't tell us that this episode in the desert was the last time Jesus faced temptation. We don't know what other temptations he faced, but I'm sure the devil didn't stop testing him. Nor does he stop testing us. Why should we be any different?

As we begin our journey through Lent, this first Sunday reminds us that we do not go into the desert alone. We don't go through *life* alone. We go with Jesus, our savior and brother. He knows what we are living *with* and living *without*. He knows our appetites and our hungers, our insecurities and our needs. So turn to him in moments of temptation or weakness. Take his hand. Accept his strength.

Look into his eyes—the eyes that have shed tears, and blinked away sweat, and smiled at a wedding feast. Turn to him—not just during Lent. Turn to him when you think no one else will understand, no one can relate, no one can grasp what you are going through.

Jesus will. Jesus *does*. He is God. But—as the temptations in the desert reveal—he is also us.