

My Brothers and Sisters,

Each year the Gospel on the First Sunday of Lent tells the story of Jesus' forty-day fast in the desert and his temptations by the devil. When Scripture calls us to fast, it is calling us first to fast from sin. At the beginning of Lent, therefore, it would be good to reflect on sin and temptation.

We probably can recognize two kinds of sins in our lives: habitual sins and occasional sins. During Lent, we should focus on fasting from our habitual sins and our serious occasional sins. When I was a freshman in high school, Fr. Frank Bryan was our religion teacher. One day he wrote two words on the blackboard: virtue and vice. He defined a virtue as a good habit and a vice as a bad habit. Sometimes our vices, our bad habits, become addictions.

Usually, when we think of addictions, we think of chemical addictions, such as drugs and alcohol. Although we easily recognize someone falling-down drunk as an alcoholic, many highly functional people are also addicted to alcohol. For example, you probably would be surprised at the number of Tribunal marriage cases in which alcohol was a major factor in the failure of the marriage. In many of these cases, neither party was a classic alcoholic. The same is true with drugs. Many people who would never take an illegal drug self-medicate, becoming dependent on prescription or non-prescription drugs.

Today many people have what are called process addictions.

- Some people are addicted to people and relationships. Over the years, I have seen this especially among teenagers in their dating relationships. However, it is not only true of teenagers.
- Some people are addicted to pornography, which is now more available than ever through the Internet. Internet pornography is a more than a \$1 billion business annually. Think of the number of people arrested for possessing or distributing child porn.
- Some people are addicted to thrills. Extreme sports would be a good example.
- Some people become addicted to things that in themselves are good, such as religion, exercise, healthy eating, or dieting.
- Some people are addicted to connectivity, i.e., e-mail, instant messaging, cell-phones, and text messaging. Think of all the people in restaurants who are on their phones constantly.
- Some people are addicted to video games. For examples, one summer I had two weddings cancel because one of the parties was addicted to video games.
- I am probably addicted to dark chocolate.

I would like to strongly suggest that if we have any addictions or addictive behaviors, we do our best to fast from them this Lent.

In today's Gospel, the devil chose the most opportune time to tempt Jesus, i.e., after he had fasted forty days and was hungry. We are most vulnerable to temptation when we are tired, stressed, lonely, and frustrated. However, temptations can be embedded in the very fabric of society. For example, we live in a consumer society. When I taught media and values, I would always give the students a picture of the two-headed monster of consumerism: "you are what you have," and "you are how you look." Advertising constantly tempts us to buy more by convincing us we do not look good enough or we do not have enough.

My brothers and sisters, we were all taught to examine our conscience when we are preparing to receive the sacrament of Reconciliation. However, when I was in the seminary, we were taught to make a particular examen daily. When we examine our consciences for Reconciliation, we are looking for sins in our lives. A particular examen is a more balanced, more realistic self-assessment. In other words, we look not only at the bad but also at the good in our lives. I would suggest this could be a good habit to develop this Lent.