

**HOMILY AT ST. MATTHEW ORTHODOX CHURCH**  
**SUNDAY, JULY 30, 2023**

**“RESISTING TEMPTATION—I Corinthians 1; I Corinthians 10”**

Sometimes priests aren't as wise as would be good. Back in the 1600s the French explorer Lasalle was traveling through what are now Louisiana and Texas. The Catholic priest who was serving as chaplain for the expedition was named Father Zenobe. Father Zenobe got very excited about the frequent buffalo hunting the explorers did. He was given a gun and took part, but he was a poor shot and never hit a buffalo. But he still enjoyed it immensely. One day one of the men shot down a huge buffalo and the priest was so excited he ran over to check out the animal. It appeared dead and he walked right up to it and started jabbing it with his gun. The other men told him to not do that---it was very dangerous! But in his enthusiasm, he ignored them and continued poking the buffalo. It was not dead, only badly injured. It got up and attacked Father Zenobe. The other men managed to save him but he was badly hurt and didn't recover for three months. (Francis Parkman, Lasalle and the Discovery of the Great West, New American Library, 1963, p. 295).

It is good to be careful with buffaloes! And even more important to be careful with sin. And there are many types of sin to be careful about and avoid. In our epistle lesson today from I Corinthians 1, the Holy Apostle Paul tells about a sin the Corinth parish was falling into----dividing up into various factions instead of staying united in Christ. This is often a big temptation in churches and can be a deadly temptation. Like all temptations, it has to be resisted and overcome with God's help.

Later in I Corinthians, in chapter 10, St. Paul writes specifically about resisting temptation. He warns us in verse 12—“Let anyone who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.” We may think we are doing quite well spiritually, but we need to be cautious we don't fall by giving in to a temptation to sin. Temptations can be very strong---and when priests hear confessions often a big part of the discussion is how to resist temptations.

Yes, temptation can be strong and very difficult to resist----but temptation is not irresistible! It is our decision alone each time as to whether or not to give in. Those of you who were around in the 1960's probably remember the comedian Flip Wilson---he had his own TV show for a few years. One of his routines was to dress up as a woman named Geraldine. She was a wild lady,

always in trouble one way or another. And every time she got caught in some mischief or another, she would always defend herself with her famous line---“The devil made me do it!” Geraldine was wrong. The devil can’t make us do anything. Yes, he tempts us....but each decision is ours to make.

You have been united to Jesus Christ in Holy Baptism. The Holy Spirit came into you in Holy Chrismation. Therefore, you can resist, by God’s help, any temptation. As St. Paul wrote in I Corinthians 10: 13---“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, and will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”

Resisting temptation is never impossible because Christ is with you to help you and strengthen you. You never have to give in!

But you do have to work hard in cooperation with God to resist. If we are spiritually lazy, we will often fail to resist. St. John Chrysostom, over 1600 years ago, preached about this, saying, “How is that sin can overtake you? Because you are lazy.” (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Volume 6, “Romans”, Intervarsity Press, 1998, p. 163) If we are spiritually lazy, temptation will defeat us. If we work hard spiritually, with God’s help we can be victorious.

*Today we will look at 2 ways to work at resisting temptation-----*

### **NUMBER ONE---DON’T LEAD YOURSELF INTO TEMPTATION.**

Every day we pray in the Lord’s Prayer---“Lead us not into temptation.” But then all too often we lead ourselves into temptation! So whose fault is it when we sin?

There was a man who was dieting---he especially had sworn off all sweets. But, boy, did he love doughnuts! Every day he drove by a donut shop on the way to work. And he almost always stopped to buy donuts to eat on the way to work and probably have some more during the day. Now he had to try to drive by the donut place every day without stopping! And that donut shop emitted a wonderful odor of donuts, so he always kept his car window open when driving by to get a smell of it! One day, the smell was so wonderful that he just had to drive around the block to get another good sniff. And then he drove around the block again.....and again.....and again..... Then he noticed an empty parking spot right next to the open window the beautiful smell was coming out of. So he figured he would park there for a couple of minutes and enjoy it---after all, no calories from just smelling donuts! But after a couple of minutes of that he just couldn’t handle it anymore---so he broke down and went inside and bought a few donuts to munch on while

driving to work! (in "Our Daily Bread", 11/9/91).

Don't be like that guy who led himself into temptation. Don't drive around the block!

Instead of leading ourselves into temptation, we should run away from it. If we have an alcohol problem, not a good idea to hang out a lot at the neighborhood tavern..... If we have a problem with pornography, not a good idea to spend lots of time exploring the internet... When temptation comes, say a prayer and run away! Don't keep driving around the block!

## **NUMBER TWO---DON'T GO ALONG WITH THE CROWD**

Remember who you are---a disciple of Jesus Christ. Then *be* who you are! Don't be like everyone else.

Maybe your friends and relatives and co-workers, etc., do certain things, say certain things, that you know a disciple of the Lord should not do. So just don't do it. Be free. Don't let yourself be controlled by other people, only by the Holy Spirit. Lots of pressure? Sure, that can be the case, but just do what you know is right and don't do what you know is wrong. Sometimes it is a very good thing to stick out like a sore thumb.

A very prevalent sin is gossip. Priests hear about it a lot in Confession, which is probably why you hear a lot about it in sermons! It is deadly, nasty, and a hard temptation for many to resist. But as St. Paul wrote in I Corinthians 10:13---"God is faithful and will not let you be tempted beyond your strength." So you can, with God's help, resist the temptation to gossip.

Whether at work, or with friends, at school, with relatives, at church.....No one can make you say one single word unless you decide to utter it. So if you don't want to sin by gossiping----say a prayer when the temptation arises and then just don't say words of gossip. Change the subject, keep quiet, or walk away if you have to. Why let someone else run your life and pressure you into saying what you don't want to say? Just don't say words of gossip---pray about it, be firm---and God will help you not sin.

But it's true that group pressure to gossip, lie, etc. can be very strong! Some years back an experiment was done with teens to find out how strong peer pressure really was. A bunch of teens were broken down into many groups of 10 each. Each group would meet in a separate room for the experiment. Earlier, a facilitator would meet with only 9 teens from each group and explain it was set-up situation. Each group would see 3 lines on a chalkboard in their room. One long, one short, one medium-length. The 9 were told that when their group met, and each was asked which line was

longest, they should all one by one say the shortest line was longest.

So the meetings were held. The facilitators showed the 10 the 3 lines and one by one asked the “in the know” 9 which line was longest. One by one, they all picked the line that was actually shortest. Then teen #10 would be asked. After some hemming and hawing and looking quite confused, #10 would go along with the crowd, against what his or her own eyes said, and say the shortest line was really the longest. Of all the groups, only a few of the #10s stuck with reality as opposed to giving in to peer pressure! (in “Our Daily Bread”, 6/5/06)

Be the hold-out! Be willing to be different! Because you are a disciple of our Lord. Remember who you are, live out who you are, resist the temptations that come upon you.

Yes, temptation can be very strong indeed. But remember what St. Paul wrote in I Corinthians 10:13----with God’s help, every temptation can be defeated. So don’t keep driving around the block that has the donut shop. Don’t go along with the crowd. Use prayer, your will power, and the power of the Holy Spirit within you to resist temptation and live in obedience to Christ.