

This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

I have a problem. Actually, I have many problems, but the problem I want to share with you today is the problem I have with soda (or pop, or whatever you chose to call it). The problem is that soda isn't very good for you. Not only is it bad from the sugar and calorie standpoint, but as a runner, it's also the carbonation that is detrimental. Now, I wouldn't consider myself a soda-addict, I don't need to have a soda or two every day. But it seems that the times that I want soda the most is right around the times when I am running. I just crave it. It's a temptation to me.

Maybe you have something that is a temptation to you. Perhaps it's the temptation of eating too much because you're stressed out. Perhaps your temptation is alcohol. Perhaps, there's even a temptation to spend too much time on your smartphone and not enough time with your family. And sometimes don't we imagine temptations like this playing out with a little devil on the one shoulder, and a little angel on the other. It doesn't matter what it is, it doesn't matter who it is, temptation is just a fact of life.

Temptation has been with us since that awful day in Eden when our first parents traded in their righteousness for a bite of forbidden fruit. Temptation rears its ugly head on a daily basis. And what are some of the common reactions to temptation? Surely there are times when we give in to temptations. There are other times when we minimize how bad they are. Sometimes, we might even laugh at our temptations. Because it's certainly easier to laugh at temptations than it is to resist them. But while we may laugh at them, deep down we know that temptation is no laughing matter. Because oftentimes, the laughing face hides a guilty heart and a sobbing soul.

The apostle Paul wrote in Corinthians, **"No temptation has overtaken us except what is common to mankind."** But am I the only one who wonders whether or not we are living in a time of extremely difficult temptation? In the Lord's Prayer we pray, "Lead us not into temptation," but looking around our world it sure doesn't seem like God is listening. Just compare what we see to just a few of God's commandments: We are to remember the Sabbath Day, regularly hear God's Word, and yet only 1 in 5 Americans attend church regularly. We're to honor our father and mother, but many households have a mother and a father...and a step mom or a step dad...or maybe mom's new boyfriend. Honor them? What's a kid to do? We're to keep ourselves away from adultery, and yet anyone with a smartphone is just a click or two away unsavory adult websites.

I'm sure you can think of any number of other examples. We may joke about temptation, but temptation is no laughing matter. It's a matter of life or death! As long as we live in this world, we live on the devil's turf. Temptation is all around us. As long as we have a body, we live with a sinful nature. Temptation is within us, and until that day when Christ returns, the devil will never tire of tempting us. His fury is great and his time is short! Satan's temptations will not stop. So where should we turn for help in temptation? Some people try to ignore it, others try to drown out temptation with drugs or alcohol, but none of those is a real solution. Our lesson today gives us the one real solution: REPENT! TURN TO JESUS WHEN YOU FACE TEMPTATIONS.

TURN TO JESUS WHEN YOU FACE TEMPTATION. Why? Jesus knows all about temptation. The water from his baptism was barely dry when St. Mark wrote: **"At once the Spirit sent [Jesus] out into the wilderness, and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan."** For forty days and forty nights in the wilderness, Jesus went toe-to-toe with the devil. The devil had three very special temptations that he wanted to share with Jesus. Soft. Subtle. But bold beyond belief! He tempted Jesus' belly—make these stones into bread. He tempted Jesus to put the Father to the test by taking a flying leap off the pinnacle of the temple. He tempted Jesus to forsake the Father's saving plan by giving the devil his due by bowing down to worship him. The whole world would belong to Jesus! Think about it. Satan is bold enough to tempt the very Son of God. In his temptations, he is brazen enough to use God's Word against the Word made flesh. His singular purpose was to derail God's plan of salvation before it ever left the station.

Jesus knows all about temptation. Satan was there at the beginning of Jesus' ministry in the desert. He was there still tempting Jesus on the final night of his ministry in Gethsemane, tempting Jesus, again and again, to flee from the Father's saving plans. His temptations were different this time. No longer were they soft, sweet, and subtle. Now Satan was tempting Jesus with raw fear! The fear of complete rejection by his followers and even his Father. Terror at the thought of the next day's torture. Dread at the thought of his coming death. Utter horror at the literal hell he was about to suffer. Gut wrenching disgust at the thought of drinking the contents of the cup he would gulp down.

Jesus prayed earnestly for the Father to take the cup from him. What's so bad about a cup? That depends on what's in the cup! So what is in the cup in Jesus' trembling hands? The rebellion of an Adam. The drunkenness of a Noah. The lies of an Abraham. The deceit of a Jacob. The adultery of a David. The greed of a Matthew. The denial of a Peter. The betrayal of a Judas. The murder of a Paul. All of it was in the cup. And more . . . The sins of my past that I am desperate to keep secret. They're in the cup! The thoughts in my head. They're in the cup. The words I've spoken to hurt

others. They're in the cup. The deeds I've done to please myself and make others miserable. They're in the cup. What have you thought, said, or done today that's in the cup? And the One who knew no sin drank the cup and made these sins his very own.

And right here we come face-to-face with the deep end of Christian truth! The Son of God, who is pure holiness, takes the world's sinfulness and makes it his very own. The eternal life giver, faces death by crucifixion. The Son, who is love, is now to be shown the backhand of the Father's wrath! Jesus is true God and true man. The thought of what was about to happen to him terrorized him as true man and revolted him as true God. In spite of it all, he remained perfectly pure and perfectly in tune with the Father's will. He prays, **"Abba, Father...everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."**

Jesus turned to his Father in prayer. Temptation was trounced. The cup was drunk down to the dregs. Jesus left Gethsemane and carried his cross to the place of the skull. And there God condemned sin. In Christ, God's just judgment is perfectly served in his Son. Through Christ, we are served with mercy, forgiveness, and healing! In a garden, our first father, Adam, sinned and then ran. In a garden, Christ, our brother, remained holy and stood firm!

And, meanwhile, a stone's throw away, **"[Jesus] returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. 'Simon,' he said to Peter, 'are you asleep? Couldn't you keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.'"**

Peter, James, and John had a special relationship with Jesus. They were the inner circle of the 12 disciples. They had seen amazing things. They saw Jesus raise a little girl from the dead, they were with him as he was transfigured before them. Oh, the things they had seen and heard! In spite of all this, they were capable of saying some pretty amazing things. Like when James and John sent their mother to ask Jesus to let them sit at Jesus' right and left in his heavenly kingdom? They assured Jesus that they too could drink the cup that Jesus would drink! Peter promised Jesus that even if everyone else fell away from him, he never would. Peter said he was willing to die for Jesus!

The ones who were willing to die for Jesus and reign with Jesus couldn't keep their eyes open to watch and pray with Jesus. Jesus had only asked one thing of them: **"Stay here and keep watch."** Instead of being a source of comfort for Jesus in his humanity, they snored loudly—overcome with sorrow. Their heavy hearts and eyelids were proof that the flesh is weak! They did exactly the opposite of what Jesus asked.

Watch and pray. Watch! How many accidents have happened because someone took his or her eyes off the road and put them onto a phone for just a few seconds? How many millions of batters have struck out because, just for a split second, they took their eyes off the ball? Keeping your eyes open is important. How much more important it is to keep the eyes of your heart open and on the lookout for Satan's tricks! Procrastinating our life of worship . . . Dull listening to the Word . . . Laziness with holy living . . . Apathy in our life of prayer . . . Eyelids droop. Vision blurs. Souls go to sleep. Satan prowls closer and closer, circling for the kill!

Watch and pray. **Pray!** The flesh is weak, but—praise God the Holy Spirit!—our spirits are still willing. Turn to the Lord in prayer when temptation comes alluring! Turn to the Lord in prayer trusting two promises: (1) With God, all things are possible. He's stronger than Satan. He's tougher than temptation. (2) God's will will always be done. And what is God's will when it comes to temptation? He clearly reveals it: *"God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it"* (1 Co 10:13).

Without God's gift of prayer, the Judas in us would quickly betray, the Peter quickly deny, the John quickly sleep, the David quickly covet, and the Cain quickly kill. When the flesh trembles in weakness in the face of temptation, turn to Jesus—placing yourself completely in the hands of the One who triumphed over temptation. He has the strength and the will to keep you standing firm in times of temptation! Turn to Jesus with prayers of repentance. Rest your soul in the wounds of Jesus for forgiveness and healing for the times that our weak flesh has fallen!

Temptation is no joking matter. It rears its ugly head again and again, day in and day out. Martin Luther once quipped about temptation: "You can't keep the birds from flying overhead, but you can keep them from building nests in your hair." Turn to Jesus in times of temptation. Whenever you do, you are telling Satan's birds to go nest elsewhere. Never forget: Satan is good at tempting. The only problem for him is that Jesus is perfect at saving!

Turn to Jesus. Only Jesus. Always Jesus! Amen.