

I have an important announcement: The Maker of all human beings (GOD) is recalling all units manufactured, regardless of make or year, due to a serious defect in the primary and central component of the heart. This is due to a malfunction in the original prototype units code named Adam and Eve, resulting in the reproduction of the same defect in all subsequent units. This defect has been technically termed “Original Sub—sequential Internal Non-Morality,” or more commonly known as Original S.I.N., as it is primarily expressed. Some of the symptoms include: Loss of direction, foul vocal emissions, amnesia of origin, lack of peace and joy, selfish or violent behavior, depression or confusion in the mental component, greed, lack of generosity, fear, idolatry in myriad forms, rebellion, vulgar gestures with the hands.

The Manufacturer, who is neither liable nor at fault for this defect, is providing factory-authorized repair and service free of charge to correct this defect. The Repair Technician, JESUS, has most generously offered to bear the entire burden of the staggering cost of these repairs. There is no additional fee required. The number to call for repair in all areas is P-R-A-Y-E-R. Once connected, please upload your burden of SIN through the REPENTANCE procedure. Next, download ATONEMENT from the Repair Technician, Jesus, into the heart component. No matter how big or small the SIN defect is, Jesus will replace it with: Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Generosity, Faithfulness, Gentleness, Self-Control.

Please see the operating manual, the B.I.B.L.E. (Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth) for further details on the use of these fixes. WARNING: Continuing to operate the human being unit without correction voids any manufacturer warranties, exposing the unit to dangers and problems too numerous to list and will result in the human unit being permanently impounded. For free emergency service, call on JESUS. DANGER: The human being units not responding to this recall action will have to be scrapped in the furnace. The SIN defect will not be permitted to enter Heaven so as to prevent contamination of that facility. Thank you for your attention. GOD.

Just 2 points today – I gave one up for Lent! (And JUST for today!) First, a look at temptation, and then a word about the season of Lent itself.

Jesus faces three temptations in this gospel passage, and each of these temptations raises questions for US. First question: Why not become my own authority and act according to my own pleasure? (“Turn these stones into bread”) Second: Why not do what other people want, be what other people want? (“throw yourself down – look powerful!”) Third: Why stay with a God you can’t see when I am right here, right now, and can give you anything you want?” (“I’ll give you all the kingdoms of the world....”) The temptations we all face are variations of these basic ones. They have to do with evading our responsibilities, denying that we are creatures and assuming a life of ease and comfort, and assertion of self over others.

There are a couple of things we have to recognize about temptation: First, temptations will always come. The presence or absence of temptation means nothing. Temptations are NOT sins, otherwise Jesus wouldn’t have had any! And probably the holier we are, the MORE temptations we have, not less. Satan wants to keep us from getting closer to God, so the closer we are, the harder he’ll try. Second, temptations are real and powerful. And we usually have the same couple that come back to us again and again throughout our lives. That’s okay – we don’t want to go looking for new ones! And those come too! Third, only God can help us resist, and if we think we can make it on our own, we are in much bigger trouble. Fourth, there are

blessings for staying faithful to what God asks of us. One of those is that we grow in character and happiness and peace – as well as holiness.

Jesus' temptation came right after He was baptized. He had been marked as God's own beloved Son. We too were baptized and marked as God's own beloved ones. The temptations call that marking into question.

So what does this mean for the season of Lent? It means we need to do some introspection to see if 1) we are trying to set aside God's will for us for something that pleases us more. 2) We do not take our baptism and its implications seriously enough. 3) We are willing to stand against the crowd, including our fellow workers and even friends and possibly family, in order to be faithful to the purposes of God, even if we do not fully understand them. The temptations in this story deal with the heart and soul of temptation. They apply when we try to get ahead in school, business, church, job, life. They apply to relationships in marriage and friendship, work, school, and parenting --or being still under the care of a parent. In each interpretation of these temptations we should be enabled to see how our faith in Jesus can help us live lives that please God, rather than just ourselves. Pleasing God overcomes temptations – gives us direction and purpose – and ultimately leads us to happiness and peace. (Adapted from Jerry L. Mercer, *LECTIONARY HOMILETICS*, March 1998, p. 6-7)

The story is told of a Jewish rabbi who had a servant named Jacob. They would often ride together in a horse-drawn cart. The rabbi was extremely fond of his wonderful horse. It was a beautiful, brown, lively animal. Once, when they were traveling through Russia, the rabbi decided to spend the night at an inn in a small town. As was the custom, Jacob, the servant, spent the night at the stable with the horse.

Into the stable that night came a horse trader with a big bottle of vodka. He made friends with Jacob, and they drank and drank until the early hours of the morning, when the horse trader bought the rabbi's horse for a song. The next morning the servant woke up, horrified at what he had done. He didn't know what to do next, for at any moment the rabbi would arrive. SO he ran over, picked up the cart, placed himself between the cart poles and began munching on the straw.

The rabbi came out of the inn and said, "What is this? Where is my horse?"

Jacob said, "Horse? I'm your horse!"

The rabbi said, "You must be insane! Jacob, have you lost your mind? What has happened to my horse?"

Jacob responded, "Rabbi, don't get angry. I must make a confession to you. Many years ago, I failed. I slipped and fell. I had sex with a woman who wasn't my wife. What's really bad, Rabbi, is that I enjoyed it and I wasn't sorry. God punished me by making me a horse – your horse! For all these years I've pulled your cart around, and today my penance is over! Blessed be God!"

The poor rabbi who was very devout said, "Well, all things are possible with God. This is amazing!" While the rabbi was swept off his feet by this miraculous event, there was a practical problem. How could they continue their journey without a horse?

So the rabbi had Jacob wait there and went to the market. When he came to the horse traders, he found himself face to face with his own horse who was munching on some hay. He went and whispered in the horse's ear, "For goodness sake, Jacob, so soon – again?!" (*THE LENTEN LABYRINTH*, Edward Hays, p. 27-29)

Second, something about this season of Lent. We know it is a time to convert, to change, to deepen our relationship with God. So we give things up. But maybe we need to delve a little deeper than giving up chocolate or dessert or wine. We could discover what needs to change in our lives by asking for God's help. We can simply pray, "Lord, help me to know what you want to change in me." This is one of those requests that God will surely answer. We ask for help; then we listen. It is often said that we must be careful what we ask for. With a little reflection, most of us will find ordinary habits and ways of being and acting that we aren't very proud of. If you can't, just ask your spouse – or your parent – or your child! We think of things we do and things we never get around to doing. We can feel the call to change our attitudes, or self-absorption, or stinginess or greed, or our way of interacting with others. We reflect: Perhaps a spouse, a loved one, a friend, a family member, a coworker, has told me something about myself that gets in the way of communication, that make relating to him or her difficult. Did they speak a word that I need to hear – AND act on? And here I am simply resenting them! They MAY be the voice of God speaking to us.

Maybe I don't really take God – or my faith – or my walk with Christ – very seriously. Oh, I go to church on Sunday, but I'm basically a freeloader. I don't contribute, or not at all what I should, I don't volunteer for anything, I'm really just fulfilling an obligation hoping it will keep me from hearing the words "Depart from me, you evildoer" at the end of my life. Perhaps I've let my mind and imagination become cluttered with escapist junk – through the Internet, too much TV, dreaming of more and more expensive vacations, things, cars. Maybe I overwork and ignore my family. Perhaps I don't spend enough time with my spouse or my kids. Maybe I don't spend enough time at home when I'm out of school – maybe I'm not respectful or appreciative of all that my parents do for me and don't help around the house or only do so with a begrudging attitude. Maybe I indulge unhelpful habits. Maybe I realize that I rarely, if ever, hear the cry of the poor – and answer it. Perhaps dishonesty on many levels has become a way of life. I rarely tell the truth. One of the roadblocks in my relationship with God may be a deep wound or resentment from the past, something I continue to hold against others – or myself.

Something all of us can do is commit ourselves to being more reflective during Lent. We can simply make a point of being more observant, more aware of what we're experiencing, more cognizant of our automatic behaviors. We can then start paying attention to our many desires. During Lent, we can examine these desires and see which of them we need to purify,