Father O'Connor's Homily for 22 February 2026
First Sunday of Lent – A

Genesis 2:7-9, 3:1-7
Romans 5:12-19
Matthew 4:1-11

There is a story from the old West about a preacher traveling from town to town, evangelizing the settlers. It was getting to be evening so he parked his horse and buggy in the stall and went into the local inn for some dinner.

A young man in town named Jacob saw an opportunity. He disconnected the horse from the buggy and went around the corner to the horse traders and sold the preacher's horse. He returned to pull the buggy back into the stall just when the preacher came out of the inn.

The young thief was clever. He got down on his knees, took a mouthful of hay and said, "Don't you know me, preacher man? My name is Jacob, and I used to be your horse. I broke so many of the Ten Commandments that God punished me by turning me into your horse. But just now God forgave me, and here I am, Jacob, a regular man again."

The preacher was quicker than the thief. He went around the corner to the horse traders and spotted his horse and whispered in his ear, "Oh, my goodness, Jacob. You have sinned again? So soon? Already?"

Well, temptation and sin…. We are all very well-acquainted with them, and we probably have stories of our own about them. But temptation is not only in front of <u>us</u>. On this First Sunday of Lent, we heard the Gospel about how Jesus, the Son of God, was tempted too: "Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil." Can we find parallels in our own lives with these three temptations that the devil put before Jesus?

Jesus had been fasting for forty days and forty nights, and He was hungry. The devil says to Him, "If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become loaves of bread." That may sound like a reasonable suggestion, at least at first hearing. Could Jesus have turned those stones into bread? Of course He could. But He answers the devil, "One does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes forth from the mouth of God."

Jesus points out that doing this would be a pretty selfish miracle. He had come to do His Father's will, and that was something far greater than just getting His hungry tummy full of food. And that is a temptation that can come our way too, when the subject of our prayers is pretty selfish or the motive is self-serving.

A group was reflecting on this Gospel passage and one man said, "I will tell you about my temptation this week. My boss told me that he had a great opportunity for me that would expand my sales territory. I told him that I did not need more territory, that I was already gone four nights a week, and that my wife and my daughter needed me to be home.

"Then my boss turned the offer around and said, "Well, you know that it is more and more expensive to raise a family today. Think of this opportunity as being good for your wife and your daughter."

The salesman looked at the group and said, "And that was the temptation."

We can rationalize our selfishness to make it look generous and even altruistic. But we need to look carefully at our motives. Am I doing what God wants me to do, or do I simply want more, and somehow that more is never enough?

Then the devil takes Jesus up a high tower in the temple and says to Him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written: 'He will command His angels concerning you, and with their hands they will support you, lest you dash your foot against a stone.'"

Could Jesus have thrown Himself down from the temple tower and have angels come and rescue Him? Of course He could. But He didn't do that. Why not? Because that would be dabbling with the merely spectacular

That is not how Jesus wanted to gather us together, by doing spectacular stunts. Most often the Lord visits us in the plain circumstances of daily life.. It can take greater eyes of faith to see Him in the everyday than in the absolutely spectacular. For He is Emmanuel: God with us, here and now.

And then the devil takes Jesus up a high mountain and shows Him the kingdoms of the world, and says to Him, "All these I shall give to you, if you will prostrate yourself and worship me."

This was a temptation for Jesus to compromise His integrity. Jesus knew that His passion and death on the cross were still to come. And the devil was offering Him a shortcut. "You don't have to go through all that suffering. I will give you all this glory right now." But Jesus did not fall for that. He went down the mountain to willingly suffer and die for us, so that our sins be forgiven, and that we might share in the glory of His resurrection and His gift to us of eternal life.

This Gospel shows us that we are not alone in our temptations. Even Jesus was tempted by the devil, but He never sinned. Every time we say "no" to a

temptation, we are growing in the corresponding virtue, and we are saying "yes" to our loyalty to Jesus Christ. And He extends His hand to us.

There is a poem about this, which is entitled, "The Pit."

A man fell into a pit and couldn't get out.
Buddha said: "Your pit is only a state of mind."
A Hindu said: "This pit is for purging you and making you more perfect."
Confucius said: "If you would have listened to me, you would never have fallen into that pit."
A New-Ager said: "Maybe you should network with some other pit-dwellers."
A News Reporter said: "Could I have the exclusive story on your pit?"
A County Inspector said: "Do you have a permit for that pit?"
A Realist said: "That's a pit."
An Idealist said: "The world shouldn't have pits."
An Optimist said: "Things could be worse."
A Pessimist said: "Things will get worse."
Jesus, seeing the man, took him by the hand and lifted him out of the pit.

Jesus knows where we need His strength because He knows our weaknesses. And He offers us His hand to us in very personal ways during this Lent: through the Sacrament of Baptism, through the Sacrament of Penance, through the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, through our prayer, our fasting and our almsgiving.

How is it that you are tempted? No one needs to feel alone. Jesus extends His hand to all of us. And we can say to Him, "Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home."