

How should we read the devil’s lines in the gospel? What tone of voice should we use? Would it be a sort of baiting tone “IF you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.” Or maybe it was a more personal taunt: “If YOU are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread why don’tcha?” Or maybe the devil was suggesting that Jesus was a fool to believe such a thing: “If you ARE the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.”

Now, each of those interpretations may have some merit, we are sometimes taunted into doing the wrong things, but I don’t know, that’s not the way most of my temptations come. From my own experience, I suspect the devil would have sounded like a good friend, speaking in a supportive, encouraging fashion: “Come on, if you’re the Son of God, you can do this, you’ve got the power! Command this stone to become bread!”

And Jesus would think, “I am hungry, and food is a human need. Noone would get hurt if I did this and, besides, it’s something my Father does all the time anyway: sends weather to erode stones which become soil, giving nutrients to wheat plants helping them grow wheat seeds that people grind into flour to make bread. It takes a lot longer that way, but what could be wrong with speeding it up and turning this stone directly into bread? Hmm...”

Now some of you may be bothered to think that Jesus ever even considered going along with the devil’s suggestions.

“Oh, no! He’s the Son of God. He would be on to that devil immediately and come right back with that quote from Scripture: “One does not live on bread alone.” But that would downplay a very important fact about Jesus: He is God, yes, but God become human! And, in case you haven’t noticed, human beings get tempted.\*

I don’t know about you, but when I’m being tempted, I do not generally see the devil in all his ugliness or hear him suggest with a sneaky and wicked laugh that I should do such and such a thing. That would be too obvious! Even I could resist that kind of temptation!

The voice of temptation seems to come most often as a friendly voice. It may come from outside, from my actual friends suggesting something, or doing something, I know to be wrong – but . . . I like them, and I want to be part of the group, I want them to like me. I don’t want them to see me as some wet blanket or party pooper or whatever, and so I’m . . . tempted . . . to do what I know is wrong.

But more often, I think, the voice of temptation speaks from within me. It’s a thought that just occurs to me “Hey, now there’s something I could do. I know they taught me not to, but it’s not that bad. Besides, everyone else is doing it, so why shouldn’t I? It doesn’t really matter, nobody’s going to get hurt. At least not that much!”

You see, the voice of temptation comes so often sounding like the voice of reason. And, from a very friendly voice, my own! And yet, to be a temptation, there has to be another voice that says “Don’t do it.” I may not want to

listen to it, I may want to squelch that voice, but that's the voice that's really being friendly, the voice that really wants what's best for me.

Being tempted is not a sin. We shouldn't deliberately place ourselves in temptation, we know how that can end up, but being tempted, in itself, is not a sin. Jesus was tempted in every way that we are tempted, but did not sin. He listened to that other voice, that really friendly voice, and acted in the way that was in keeping with who he was.

In case you're wondering what was wrong with commanding stones to become bread, or getting the power and glory of all the kingdoms of the world, or throwing himself off the parapet of the temple just to see if God would protect him, none of those things were in keeping with who Jesus is. All of them would be an example of him thinking "It's all about me!" He'd be saying "My life is about me filling my belly, it's about me becoming rich and famous, it's about me making my Father do what I want!"

But Jesus didn't come out of love for himself. He came out of love for you. And he knows what it's like to be tempted. Turn to him when you are tempted. He can help. Even if you fall for it, turn to him afterwards. He can still help.

He wants to help. He wants you to become what you were meant to be. That's why he came.

\* In the next few weeks our RCIA Candidates and Catechumens will be modeling something for us. After the Rites of Election and Continuing Conversion with Bishop Bradley tomorrow they are being called to consider what there is in their lives that is weak, defective or sinful and bring them for healing. But they are also called to consider what is upright, strong and good in their lives that needs to be strengthened. They lead us all. We all need to do both of those things. For we all fall to temptation.