

The last 2 bulletin articles have been on Lent so since this has turned into a little series on Lent, this article is called simply: Lent, Part 3 with the subtitle indicating the main subject for this week.

This week's article will pick up where last week's left off. Recall that the season of Lent is focusing on the most basic, fundamental acts of love for our Lord – purification, the fight against temptation for the sake of our Lord (because He wants us to), because it is necessary for us in order to become like Him, because we cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven without embracing it. It is the first and most fundamental response to our Lord's command to: deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Me. It cannot be skipped for those who would be sons and daughters in our Father's Kingdom.

Last week's article considered the readings from the First Sunday of Lent – the temptations of Christ – and ended by noting the peculiar thing mentioned at the end of that Gospel, namely that there was a totality of all temptations in these 3 temptations. How can that be? In the First Letter of John, St John the Apostle, under Divine inspiration, says: "For all that is in the world – the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life – is not from the Father but is from the world" (1 Jn 2:16). The Church has long understood that all temptations/sin falls into one of these general categories:

- Lust of the eyes: the things of this life and this world
- Lust of the flesh: pleasure
- The pride of life: self-will over the will of God, exaltation of self, my desires.

The Church Fathers – St Augustine for example – understood that the 3 different temptations of Christ fell into these 3 different categories; hence the totality of the temptations of our Lord. Following St Augustine: cast yourself down and let the angels save you = temptation to lust of the eyes; do this for yourself in order to have worldly awe. Turn these stones into bread = temptation to lust of the flesh. I will give you all the kingdoms of the earth – you can be a great worldly power and all men will bow down to you = temptation to the pride of life.

The reason for presenting this is not just academic or to have something to say. Lent focuses us on the purification needed to enter Heaven, getting rid of that which stands between me and the Lord, thereby reciprocating His love. Of course this includes acknowledging our sins and sinfulness. These categories help to see our sins. Perhaps, then, we can expound on these a little more to help facilitate this striving towards returning the love of our Lord. Don't be afraid to do it. The Lord wills it. He *wants* to bestow His mercy.

Lust of the eyes, lust of the flesh – what does it mean? It is helpful to start with the word lust. Lust does not necessarily just mean sexual desire, although that's the common use of the word. Lust more generally means an inordinate or disordered desire. You might think of dog going after a piece of meat – it predominates him. The word inordinate means excessive or immoderate (i.e., without moderation) so lust is an excessive or immoderate (over the top) desire. While 'excessive' or 'over the top' are probably helpful terms in getting started in understanding 'inordinate' and thus what is meant by lust, they might also fall a little short in expressing its full meaning. Love of God, of another person, or some thing means that I put it (or them) first. An inordinate or disordered desire or love (which is called lust) means that the something (or someone) that I love, my first and foremost desire, is something or someone other than God. It ultimately ties back to my own desires. Love does not hold back for the beloved; lust, on the other hand, does – it seeks satisfaction of self firstly, at least sometimes and to some degree. It is much easier to slide into than we might first realize.

Someone might wonder: does lust of the eyes mean that I can't use or have any desire for even the basic necessities of this life like food, shelter, and clothing? Does it mean I should not work for these things at all? Did our Lord not say: he who does not work should not eat, and: by the sweat of your brow you shall earn the bread you eat? Yes, our Lord did indeed say these things, and He meant them. Lust of the eyes goes to my mindset or outlook or attitude towards these things. Love of God means that even the work I do is because our Lord commands it and I offer it to Him first and foremost. Lust of the eyes means that, at least to some degree,

I desire the stuff in and of itself, it's at least a bit of an idol, that to some degree and at least on occasion I give the things of this life and this world too much weight, too much importance, I desire them too much.

A second question or error that might happen, if I don't understand what John means by 'lust,' is to say something like: oh well, my desire is not over the top, the level of my desire is ok. While lust for this, that, or the other can have degrees, freedom from lust is a categorical difference, it's not just a matter of degree. In other words, my inordinate desire might be *relatively* small but that doesn't mean it's not still inordinate.

So what does "lust" in general mean? What does lust of the eyes and lust of the flesh mean? An analogy from marriage might be helpful. Let's say a spouse does think of their spouse's happiness often and puts themselves out for them fairly frequently. Then having done so, they say something like: well, now this is me time and this is what I want to do. Does it mean that there's no love of the spouse? No, but there is some holding back for one's self, to some degree and at least occasionally. Lust of the eyes or lust of the flesh are the same – just different objects being lusted over. What it means is that I still, to one degree or another, say: Lord, you can wait now, I've done some things for you (or not), now I'm doing something I want. Love of God entails a complete holy forgetfulness of self. The Lord is first and foremost all the time, everything is for Him.

The purpose of all of this is two-fold: so that we can recognize temptation better when it comes, and secondly to use it to think about and examine ourselves. Some examples of each, then, will be helpful. Lust of the eyes: letting the things of this world and this life have too much importance. This could be either tangible or intangible things. Intangible things could be relations with others or human respect. We should note again that lust of the eyes is not just a matter of something being evil but rather giving the thing too much importance, to central of a place, not subordinating it to eternal life. Take for example pornography. That's evil in and of itself, it's not a good, whereas good family relations are something good. But good family relations can serve as a lust of the eyes, something for which I have an inordinate desire, something where I might even often times be seeking myself, at least in some ways – acting as if they are the most important thing, perhaps even willing to sacrifice what is right and good true, just so I can have them. Have you ever gotten mad because a family member didn't respond to you in the way you desired? It is lust of the eyes – a disordered desire for me.

In Sacred Scripture we hear God chastise man for "worshipping the work of his hands." This might go across all 3 categories of temptation. Almost always it reflects pride of life. I step back and start reviewing all of my great work, keeping a resume in my mind and reviewing it frequently. This can even corrupt good religious and devotional practices. It might also reflect lust of the eyes: I did this to have a lot of stuff of this life and this world, and by the way, mine is better than the other guy's too. It might also be a lust of the flesh – I did this so I can have comfort, free of sacrifice or difficulty.

Have I been controlled by fear at times, maybe afraid of what others will think or what might happen to my income or health insurance, to my stuff, if I do what is right? This is lust of the eyes.

Sports. As has been said before, sports are not by any means evil and can certainly be used for good. But how quickly and easily, not to mention frequently, these receive too much importance. Sports for kids on Sundays, perhaps even scheduled in such a way that the person cannot get to Mass if they participate, are an encroachment on the Lord's Day itself. Have I tolerated this well enough? This easily becomes lust of the eyes.

While lust of the flesh certainly includes any and all inordinate sexual desire or activity, it is not limited to that; it pertains to all pleasures of this life. Rest and comfort, food and drink, entertainment, social media – all of these can easily become number 1.

What is the counter to: the lust of the eyes, lust of the flesh, and the pride of life? To put it in a simple and most general way, the counters are: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving – the very topics of the Gospel on Ash Wednesday. Prayer, the counter to pride of life, includes not only vocal prayers like the Rosary but also the sacraments and meditation as well. Remember that you are dust...this remembering is a form of prayer, which helps counter all 3 temptations. Almsgiving – the counter to lust of the eyes; this stuff that I can cling to is not all that important or at least not #1. And fasting, the counter to lust of the flesh.

*God bless you, Fr Kuhn*