

**2-10-08 Homily by Father Larry Covington**  
**Matthew 4: 1-11**

The problem with temptations, is that they tend to make good sense if only for a particular time and set of circumstances. For the most part when we encounter temptation it is an invitation to a struggle between the immediate and future, more so than between the good and the bad. When we give in to temptation the immediate wins and the future suffers. Let me bring it closer to home. For instance, the waiter comes around with the wicked evil desert cart saying, Saying, “Do you want this key lime pie or the German chocolate cake?” “We have double deluxe death by chocolate hot fudge torte smothered in crème caramel with shaved with white chocolate?” “Wow.” Get thee behind me Satan! Well, I don’t know. Maybe this time, what do you think? We can divide one. Can we get that with ice cream? And now, the immediate, is satisfied, but the future? Well, we will leave that to the bathroom scale. But let’s go a little deeper. The day of reckoning comes when you are a college student. The temptations of campus life have been irresistible and studying *very* resistible. So we cheat to pass a test but never master the subject. The more we steal and gain thereby while later on the victim suffers the loss. Now when we think about this truthfully this is the place we go in our minds lying, to ourselves and to others, stealing, whether

it's something physical and immediate or whether it's that kind of feeling where no one else gets hurt. But I think there is more to be learned and the implications of our choices are more radical than we may at first think.

Let's go back again to Matthew chapter 4 again and revisit this more than famous passage and see what's really happening.

Here we have Christ Jesus 40 days without anything to eat, he was hungry.

And here we have the temptation. Let's listen again to the temptation.

“Why don't you turn stones into bread?” That's reasonable. Jesus is hungry, the son of God, starving to death. Why not? “After all, Jesus you never worked a miracle; you better try one out here in the desert. You might get embarrassed when you are in front of a crowd. Give it a little try.

What's wrong with turning stone into bread? The scripture says God will protect you. You won't be hurt. Scripture says that. It's in the Bible. You know, if I did that, it would make a lot of people believe. And what's wrong with doing something that will get people to believe? Makes sense to me.

The tempter shows him the kingdoms of the world. “These are yours if...all of these are yours if...” Now wouldn't that have been wonderful if Jesus had said yes and had gained more influence over the social and political nature of our world? I could wish for it; A little more justice and fairness and equality in the world. That makes sense to me.

Because you see Jesus is approached and tested at the point of what is reasonable, what is helpful, and what is good. Fundamentally, temptation is not about the question, “Would you like to do something wrong?” When Adam and Eve were in the garden, the voice of the tempter said, “Would you like to be as God?” The voice did not say, “Would you like to live like the devil? I have a deck of cards and a fifth out in the chariot.” The voice said, “Would you like to be as God?” Something’s wrong with that? Isn’t that what we are about? Temptation at its deepest level has nothing to do with that key lime pie or chocolate fudge. It has nothing to do with that slip of paper in your pocket that has the answers to the test on it. It has nothing to do with the bottle of booze hidden out in the garage.

Jesus temptation was this: What am I going to do with my life? Real temptation is when you don’t know right from wrong. It’s not a matter of choosing the right and resisting the wrong. It is a matter of asking, what is God’s will for me? This is the real test. You see, Jesus had never preached a sermon, never healed anybody, never taught a lesson. He had not even started his ministry. So Jesus, what are you going to do with the rest of your life? Still wet from baptism, now he faces it.

Last Wednesday we received ashes on our foreheads, which has its origins from the scripture which says, “Ashes to ashes, dust to dust,” and it’s a

reflection on our whole mortality, on the brevity of life. Now I was thinking about our Ash Wednesday services, it occurred to me that, even for those of us who live to be a ripe old age, life is such a brief thing from birth to death. When you're little you turn around and you are ten. You turn around again and you're out of high school. And you turn around again and you're forty. You turn around again and before you know it you are ready for the grave. It's just like that. And so what are we going to do with this gift of life? What are you going to do with it? What am I going to do with the rest of my life? That's the task. You see the temptation that challenges many of us is the temptation to go along as we have been going. To stay put, to accept what is and shrug our shoulders. To see, and know and understand, and choose to do nothing about it, in other words to take the easy way out. To turn stone into bread. To say "yes" to the powers that be so that we might have all of this. In other words, to take the easy way out, even when the easy way seems to make good sense.

Jesus refused to take the easy way out. His temptations in the desert clarified for him his future and his destiny. And as a result he did his father's will.

What is my life anyway? If you sum it all up, have you decided that your life will have integrity and that everything you do and say will grow from

that integrity? The wonderful thing about the gospel is, even if you have never thought about it, it's not too late. And even if you have messed everything up, it is not too late. That's the meaning of Lent. That is the meaning of the gospel. That's the example of Jesus, to struggle with the will of God.

The point I have no plan to lie out, no suggestion for any of you, but I do ask this:

Say to yourself, what is my life? What am I all about? Be able to say in 25 words or less, this is who I am; and this is what I do. And no cheating.