

To be or not to be...

(Luke 4:1-13)

“To be or not to be” is a famous line from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* which succinctly describes the inner struggle we face when we are confronted with choices. Sometimes we are tempted to do something that we know we should not do, or desire something that we should not have. If we surrender to temptation, in English we often say we succumb to or yield to temptation. If we can overcome it, we resist the temptation of, for example, taking an extra piece of delicious chocolate cake. Here I have shown you on the slide some of the collocations associated with the word “temptation”.

Temptation is certainly no stranger to us. When was the last time when you were tempted to do something that you know you should not do? To lie to a friend, to cut in line in order to get something faster or to hand in a half-finished holiday homework thinking that your teacher will not notice? It could be that lapse into unruly behaviour in class, that impulsive act that you regret or that foolish and hurtful remark you wish you had never made. That is why when we recite the Lord’s Prayer every day, we say, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil”.

Temptation is so real to people that it appears in many stories from literature, notably in Homer’s *Odyssey*, in which Odysseus hears the call of the sirens, the enchanting sea-nymphs with beautiful voices luring sailors to destruction. There are also frequent references to temptation in the Bible and, in fact, temptation is so central to the Christian faith that it is one of the underlying themes mentioned in Scripture.

The passage we read today is about the temptation of Jesus, but you may remember that the first temptation of man happened in the Garden of Eden - the forbidden apple. Indeed the two passages should be read in parallel. While Adam succumbed to the temptation of Satan in the Garden of Eden, Jesus, often referred to in the Bible as the Last Adam or Second Man, was triumphant / victorious over temptation. Literally, Jesus undid what Adam had done and He promised a new life, a new beginning and a renewed relationship with God. That is why we have the story of the temptation of Jesus at the beginning of the New Testament - the new covenant that God has made with man.

What can we learn from the temptation of Christ, which has been recorded in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke? Is there any message here to help us overcome temptations? There is not enough time in this assembly for me to go over all three temptations and perhaps I will just concentrate on the first one.

According to these Gospels, after being baptized by John the Baptist, Jesus went into the wilderness and fasted for forty days and forty nights. During this time, Satan appeared to him and tried to tempt Him. In the first instance, he asked Jesus to turn a stone into bread. "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." There is of course nothing wrong with turning a stone into bread. After all, Jesus fasted for forty days and nights and I am sure he was famished. If I were in that situation and if I could turn a stone into something edible, I probably would. Of course I can't and the best that I can do is to turn bread into a stone when I overcook and burn my bread dough making the loaves as hard as rocks. Anyway, the real temptation is "if you are the Son of God". In actual fact, Satan was saying, "Are you sure you are the Son of

God? Maybe you are mistaken. Try using your power and then you will know!" The strategy that Satan used was actually self-doubt.

Don't we doubt ourselves sometimes? Maybe I am not good at studying and I might as well squander my time on something that I enjoy doing now! Maybe my question is too easy and people will laugh at me if I ask this. Maybe my ideas are not good enough and I should not raise it in the group. Maybe people will not listen to me even if I report it to the teacher. Maybe I am not lovable enough and people won't like to make friends with me.

Maybe, maybe and more maybes. The devil does not come to us all dressed in red with two horns and a tail bearing a trident except perhaps during Halloween! More often than not, the devil is that little voice that asks us to doubt ourselves. The best way to resist it is to build our confidence. We have to understand that each person is unique and each person is valuable in the eyes of God. To each of us, God has given us enough talents. What we need to do is to discover our talents, unleash our potential and use our talents to serve others.

Maybe Shakespeare's question about whether or not to give in to temptation or not can be best answered by your conscience; that still, clear voice wherein God calls on us to be our best selves. Will you answer it correctly?