

## GLIMPSE

### Temptations

Fr. Larry Gillick, S.J.

Recently I was invited to one of those breakfast places that are explicitly designed to attract the weak-willed sugarholic such as myself. Immediately inside the front door, on both sides, are counters of caloric invitations. The nerves in the part of the brain stimulated by smelling began a dance at the door of my conscience. "Come on! You deserve at least one of those. No, two. It is a matter of justice. You've been so good lately that you deserve a prize such as that round one with only a little bit of white-stuff and a cherry. You know how healthy fruit is for you."

The restaurant on a Sunday late-morning is busy and one stands in the line waiting for a table. The line is between the rolls, cakes, buns, scones, donuts, cookies, all looking like little puppies at a pet shop wanting to be taken home. One can even purchase something delightful while one waits in line. One wouldn't want to faint from hunger while being so patient.

If one makes it through that gauntlet, the menu is waiting; a long and multi-paged picturelucious display of a greater assortment available for ones post-mass appetite. "And lead us not into temptation" rings in my ears while the waitress is determined to lead me right into temptationville by relating the "specials for the day". I am thinking of a fruit cup with yogurt with an order of brown toast and green tea. I am thinking also that I do not come here that often and I really have been good, and what harm is a little sweetness in my Sunday-morning encounter. I already have resisted the pastry-attack and I deserve something good for that, don't I?

So far I haven't sinned. Maybe I lusted a little bit, through my nose, but not with the eye, which is what Jesus was talking about, I am thinking. Temptations are not sins! Actually temptations are healthy.

Temptations are always about something good in us. One might be tempted to be jealous. There is nothing wrong with that! Thoughts and feelings are appropriate human activities. It is holy and good that

I was thinking about those cinnamon rolls with pecans on top while standing in line and even now while sitting here writing. Mmm! I would like to have a huge one right now. I would also like to be able to write or speak like that person over there, with which I can compare myself and feel jealous. Feelings are just nothing more than good old human realities. I might experience embarrassment at such feelings and I wouldn't want that person or anybody to know just how human I am.

Many Catholics celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation confess feelings of impatience, anger, sexual attraction, envy and jealousy. In a sense, all they are confessing is that they are human and wish they were angels. Now, did they do something uncharitable flowing from those feelings? That's a discerning process. Thoughts and feelings often do sponsor actions which are not reflective of the love of Jesus.

When I was a young highly-charged male, we were instructed that if we ever had a sexual thought, (a temptation!) we were to think of the puzzle about the hundred pound elephant and her two fifty-pound babies getting across the river using a raft which could only hold one hundred pounds. Well, I was more interested in how the mother knew how much she and the children weighed. That didn't take long and wasn't anywhere as interesting as my fantasy.

For the most part, we are tempted about something good to do and we are tempted not to do the good. We are not so much tempted to do the bad, but just not do what is good in us and good in the sharing. Feelings of inadequacy, inferiority, pride, what others might say, need for success, all can keep the good in us from being played out. These are the temptations to sin by not revealing God's gifts to us and through us. They are sins of inaction; not-doing is a doing! The good we do might be co-sponsored by God's grace as well as our egos. Human beings will seldom do anything without the ego nibbling its way in there somehow. Our search for purity-of-intention is a perfect form of the temptation against doing good.

I celebrate temptations as a way of finding out in me what the Evil Spirit sees as good in me, because that Spirit does not want God's goodness to be shared. Even this little bit of writing is a result of being tempted not to write it, because it is dumb, irrelevant, too complicated, or somebody else has already written on this topic in

better ways. I had those feelings and I would have sinned by not facing the temptation and not facing the good I can do. It is only a glimpse and I have enjoyed the temptations without the elephants crossing that old river.