

As we probably all have experienced, temptations almost always come when we are stressed.

The stress may be as simple as being told we can't have something...and then the desire for that thing becomes very alive. How many of us wanted a burger on Friday when we can't have one?

That stress can also be difficult/complex. We have lost a loved one; we experience serious illness; problems in our relationships. People are stressed now with the seeming chaos in our government; the threat of job loss, farm loss, income loss.

We can be tempted to strike out with violence, both physically and verbally. We can be tempted to give up and give in; lose hope. We can be tempted to blame others and play the victim. We can be tempted to try to assert our control over situations. We can be tempted to drown ourselves in alcohol or drugs or food.

It comes down to: will we be tempted to react or will we choose to act in a good way?

A person's moral compass or center becomes revealed in these moments of stress. We make a statement about ourselves, our beliefs in our choice and in our reactions.

Israel's journey in the desert, or the wilderness, was foundational for them. They spent two generations out there. As we read Exodus and those other books of the Torah they were stressed by this journey. Early on, facing the stress of hunger, they were tempted to return to slavery. At least they had food from their owners. Moses had to move them forward. And they were tempted again when matters became difficult again to return to Egypt; they tried to take matters into their own hands. God finally said enough! God determined they needed to learn to trust in God. Therefore the obstinate unwavering generation were forbidden to enter into the promised land. It was the subsequent generation led by Joshua who crossed into the land; they had learned, they had no memory of slavery. During their wandering God provided the food they needed, the water they needed; reminding them again and again to trust.

Jesus' own journey into the wilderness recreates Israel's experience. He comes through the waters of baptism; he is told he is God's beloved Son, and then sent into the wilderness. Unlike Israel Jesus' faith and trust in God remains unwavering. He endures the temptations, he trusts in God's providence. He trusts in God's care for him. This will carry on even at the final temptation, agonizing in the garden he trusts in God's love.

These moments in our lives when our stress becomes overwhelming can also be moments of illumination. We can learn about ourselves, our core self. In what or whom do we trust? How do we need to grow? What do we need to let go of?

Sometimes when everything is stripped away from us, everything that we identify ourselves with, we find what is truly important. We find that we despite it all are a person loved by God. At our core, we are always a child of God. Our being rests in our willingness to be God's child. This is our faith. This is what we trust in, and hope in.

This was the Strength of Jesus; his unwavering trust in God's love for him. This is our strength that Jesus sends in the Holy Spirit to encourage us; to strengthen us; to remind us we are loved. We always have God's love; no matter how bad it seems, no matter how tempted we are to believe it is not true, it remains true.

We remain Gods' children. Even the execution of Jesus by humanity would not stop God's love for us.

Believing in Jesus as Son of God, as dying on a cross, as being raised from the dead signifies God's unwavering love for us.

A love renewed for us each Eucharist.

A love renewed for us to strengthen us as we walk this life, amid its joys and pains.

So I hope we are tempted, and I hope we find a renewed trust, so as to enter into this life more fully.