Winning Spiritual Combat over Temptation

Each year at the start of Lent, we reflect on Jesus being tempted by the devil in the desert. The Gospel ends with Jesus being victorious, and often in Lent we focus on what causes us to sin and hopefully use the season in part to better face our own temptations. So, what's a good battle plan?

As a starting point, remember that wonderful virtue called **temperance**. It regulates appetites. Some things we can do but just should not do to excess. Temperance helps us to make sure these things don't get out of control. When we are temperate, we are reminded that we need to also work, serve our family, volunteer, help others, pray, etc.

Then there are the things that are always just plain wrong. These are things that are good to try to look at during Lent and say, "how can I get rid of this entirely from my life?" They can apply to all kinds of sins.

First, when looking at the question "what can I do to make this sin go away," start with mercy. If you feel it is serious enough to go to confession, go. Bring it to God in prayer. Don't hide from it. Be accountable. And it may be something you have a really hard time overcoming, or that crops up again. Don't wallow in shame but pick yourself back up and reach out for God's mercy - because it is always there for us. God is love!

With that though we want to try to take steps to "avoid the near occasion of sin" as we say in the Act of Contrition.

Here, after a sin has occurred, look at what caused the temptations to increase. Sometimes certain situations or being in certain situations can make combating the situation really difficult.

Another thing to do is to pray. When we pray, we receive strength and grace. God knows what we are going through, so bring it to Him in prayer and ask for His help. You also might find a favorite saint had similar temptations that you did.

Also, do you talk to people who you can trust? Don't be afraid to find a confidant, a good friend, or someone you can open up to. You might know someone who knows you inside out, who you can turn to for advice and counsel. Sometimes a person may have battled the same thing you have battled too - so seek these people out.

It's also a good idea to remember that fortitude can entail running away, quite literally. Maybe you are in an environment where the temptations are really getting to you. Maybe getting away from the situation by going to work out, for a walk, or doing some work can help.

You can also look around and see if there are things that cause temptation and make adjustments; what's on your cable package? Where do you keep your phone or computer at night? Do you have friends who really love and care for you or lead you

astray? Do certain websites or social media sites cause you to make bad choices or get overly angry? Making some adjustments can really help.

Lastly, don’t give up! Remember, you will have setbacks; we all do. But remember, God’s love is always there for us, and He forgives seventy times seven.

Jesus emerges from the desert but will face temptation again - and just as He is victorious, so can we be with His grace!

God bless and have a blessed Lenten journey,

Fr. Paul