

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent – Year A:

In the war-against-drugs campaign, a popular slogan was used in commercials and billboards: “Just say no.” That is precisely the lesson the gospel reading today urges upon us.

With each temptation the devil proposes, Jesus says no. What is suggested to us in this passage from Matthew is that we have the power to keep a lot of trouble out of our lives by the use of a very simple word.

However, many of us tend to discount the power we have to resist temptation. We prefer to believe we are “victims” of circumstances, genetics, upbringing, or hormones. When we find ourselves beset with

problems, we look for someone or something else to blame, like Adam and Eve in Genesis claiming, “The serpent tricked me, and I ate” – like saying “the devil made me do it”.

The reason we don’t like to face our power to say no is that if we can say no, then saying yes is an admission of guilt. And not many of us like to admit that.

The lesson we learn in today’s readings is not that there is serious temptation awaiting us in the world; we already know that. It is not, as Paul reminds us, that sin has serious consequences for ourselves

and others; we already have experience of that.

What we are hearing is a reminder that we are responsible for most of what goes on in our lives, and we can say no – to our bad habits, our laziness, our inclination to lay blame on others for our failings,

our small-mindedness, our waste of time and energy in fruitless worry, our impulse to bring others down.

We humans can be as resistant and stubborn as we want to be. We can say no to anything we want, and stick to it. Think about it! We have the power; we use it all the time with things we don’t like.

The devil in today’s gospel displayed seductiveness by trying to get Jesus to consider values that were not in his best interests, but the greatest seduction of all is to make us believe that we are powerless

over temptation, victimized by our weakness and failings.

It is the ultimate deceit. Effective adult living will always require that we refrain from making excuses and blaming others and take full responsibility for what goes on in our lives.

We are what we are, and face what we face today because of the decisions we made yesterday.

Tomorrow will be what it will be because of decisions we make today. All because of a simple yes or no.

Lent has traditionally been a season of penance and self-denial. We mustn’t deny ourselves some good, but something bad – something that is preventing us from being the best we can be, something that

is putting our spiritual growth on hold.

It will come as a pleasant surprise how much freedom awaits us and how more productive life becomes when we learn to “just say no”.