Lead us not Into Temptation

Grace, Mercy, and Peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. For a moment think back on your days of conformation. I know that for me I was required to complete my memory work before class. Failure to do so meant whatever was not memorized had to be written out ten times. That was a mistake I only made once. If you can remember your memory work your pastor may have asked you, “What is the sixth petition of the Lord’s Prayer?” and being a good and studious conformand you would’ve answered, “And lead us not into temptation.” Then your pastor may have asked you the most feared question a conformand could be asked, “What does this mean?” And again being good conformands you would answer, “God tempts no one. We pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our sinful nature may not deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice. Although we are attacked by these things, we pray that we may finally overcome them and win the victory.” Be prepared. Test on Sunday. In all seriousness how many times have we thought about this? I mean have we honestly wondered why it is that we ask to not be lead into temptation?

I especially ask this question now as we are about to embark upon the Lenten season, a season where we typically commemorate the temptation of Jesus by “sacrificing” something from our own lives. Often times it is a luxury item or a habit that we wish to change. So aren’t we in a way leading ourselves into temptation? After all the people who give up the most difficult thing or do the best gets the prize right? Yes in a way we are leading ourselves into temptation. It seems as though we are also living contrary to what Jesus says, “**Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.**” We are giving ourselves a self fulfilling prophecy that we are destined to fail. And if we don’t fail in keeping our Lenten sacrifice we will certainly fail in other aspects of our lives. Despite the fact that giving up something for lent is not something that is commanded by God I do think that it can act as an important exercise. It can show us just how difficult it is to keep one aspect of our lives in check, let alone to be able to keep the law perfectly. I think that is truly what our gospel text is pointing towards this evening as well as this practice of Ash Wednesday. You see we commemorate the temptation of Jesus in the desert but we don’t ask ourselves why he went into the desert. We wear ashes on our heads but honestly what is that for? Why do we do these things? We truly have some strange traditions here in Christianity. Yet all of our traditions and all of our teachings point to Jesus Christ and the cross. Jesus went into the desert to be tempted by Satan in the frailty of the human condition. Jesus took all of our frailty and stood tall in the desert. He did it to demonstrate his ability to keep the law, something that we would fail at. Jesus spent 40 days being tempted by Satan because we cannot go 40 seconds without giving into his temptation. This is why we ask God to not lead us into temptation. Temptation is something we cannot resist. Yet we must ask God to guard us from it at all times. The odds are you might not make it through Lent keeping your promise and that’s ok. Jesus has resisted temptation for us. We cover ourselves in ashes to remember our origins and the original sin that we have. Yet we also use the shape of the cross to remember that the old Adam in us has been drowned and died in our baptism. We use the cross because for us it is a sign of comfort and of victory. As Paul tells us, “**For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.**” What a wonderful message. For our sake, God took that which was perfect, and covered it in our sin. He did this all so that we might become righteous. He did this all so that we might be with him. What’s even more amazing is the fact that Jesus did this willingly. He willingly took our sin upon himself.

During this time of Lent I encourage you all to remember that great temptation that we are all faced with. Remember that we are not strong enough to overcome it on our own. Remember that Christ has overcome it for you. Remember your origins and reflect on your journey as one of God’s redeemed children. Remember the willing sacrifice that will be made on Good Friday followed by the glorious resurrection. Now may the peace of God which surpasses our understanding keep and guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus now and forever. Amen.