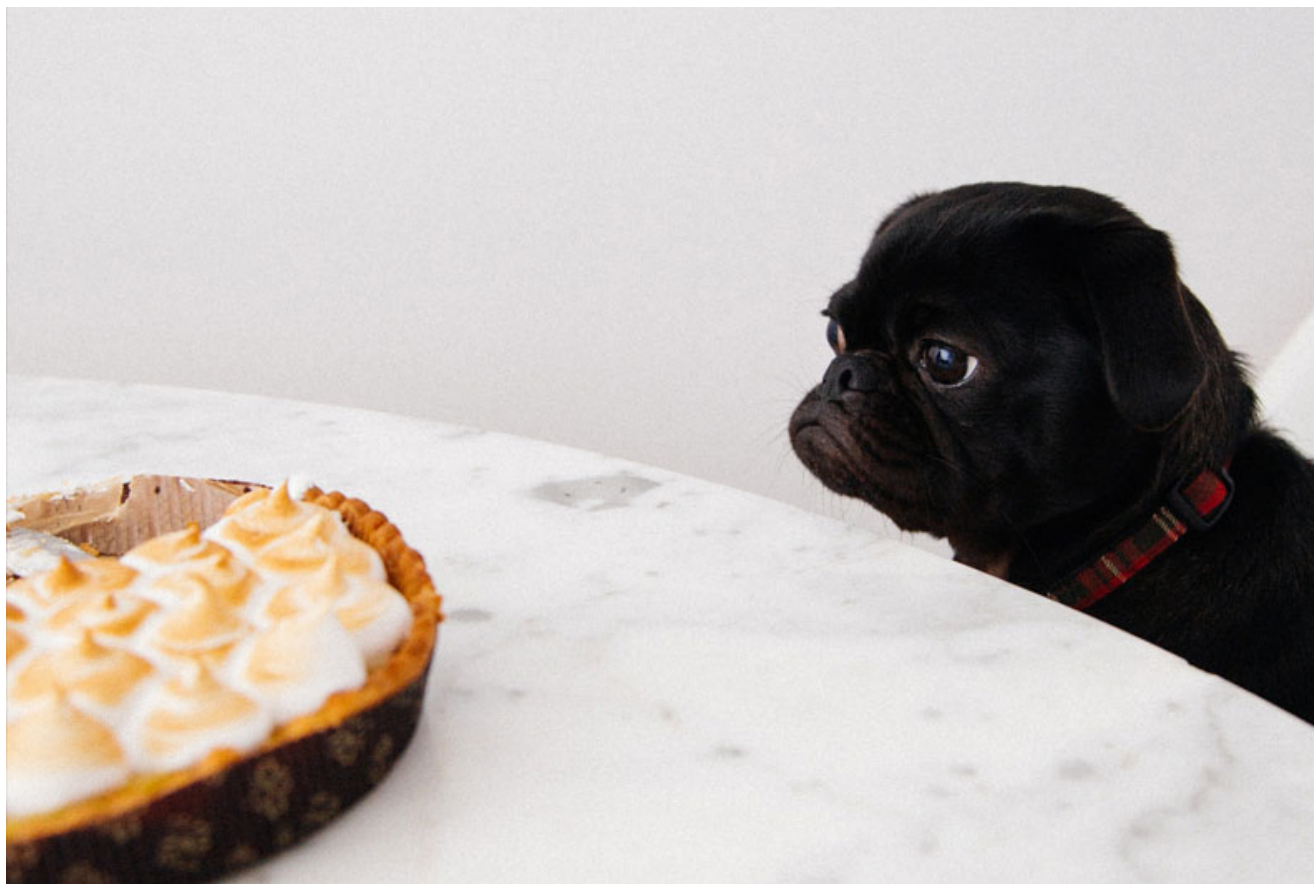


When Temptation Overwhelms Virtue

 bulldogcatholic.org/2018/06/14/temptation-overwhelms-virtue

June 14, 2018



Q: What do you do when you are in really bad temptation, and like you supposedly like the sin you are going to commit more than what is right?

A: This is a very good question. I think that every person on the planet has had the experience that you are describing. In fact, this is how it is with almost all temptations: they are very attractive. I mean, think back to the very first temptation that humans faced in the Bible. When Eve looked at the forbidden fruit, she saw that it was “good for food and pleasing to the eyes, and the tree was desirable.... (Genesis 3:6). She knew the command of God, but for whatever reason she wanted to commit the sin more than she wanted to obey God.

Our story becomes even more difficult after that first sin. Because of that first sin, we are all born with a thing called “concupiscence”. This is the attraction that we have towards things that we know are not good for us. The term is meant to indicate the tendency we have to place a good thing above a better thing. Again, think back to the first temptation. Eve wasn’t

tempted to eat something disgusting. She was tempted to eat from a tree whose fruit was delicious. The reason it was a sin is because she chose this thing in spite of (and in place of) the love she was called to live for God.

| It is really rare that we would even be tempted to something that we didn't desire in some way.

It is really rare that we would even be tempted to something that we didn't desire in some way. We are almost always tempted toward something that has some kind of good in it. The problem is that we are most often tempted to misuse something that is good in and of itself.

At the same time, our temptations can sometimes frighten us. We can be shocked at the places our minds can wander, or the thoughts that can arise at various moments. I have spoken with many people who were exceptionally disturbed by thoughts that occurred to them while they were in prayer. Even if they don't scare us, these thoughts can startle us or, at the very least, simply bother us. They can lead us to ask the question, "What is wrong with me?"

Well, first we have to realize that what is wrong with us is the reality that we are fallen. We don't see things clearly all of the time and we don't always desire the good. Again, this is the result of the fact that we experience the effects of original sin.

But a second thing to consider is that our minds are dynamic. We are not static beings. Our minds are constantly moving. Because of this, even when you attempt to calm your mind and enter into prayer, your mind is still moving. As you probably know, when we get rid of the many distractions we bring into our life, we are left alone with our thoughts. Without those distractions, our minds can sometimes seem to have a "mind of their own". This is one of the main reasons why we are shocked by our thoughts in prayer: because there are no distractions and, in the silence, what is already in our hearts gets magnified.

| ...the battles we face arise from "the world, the flesh, and the devil".

A third element to realize is that temptations typically come from one of three sources. The Bible says that the battles we face arise from "the world, the flesh, and the devil". Because of this, it is important to pay attention to the ways in which we open ourselves to these sources and how we respond to them.

The world around us can often be a source of temptation (Thank you, Father Obvious). We can respond to this source of temptation by isolating ourselves from the entire world...or we can choose to be intentional about what we "let in". For example, a person might decide that they want to do their best to avoid the many temptations that the world offers and completely remove themselves from the world. This isn't entirely a bad idea. In fact, it takes very seriously the reality of sin and its consequences. And there are some who are called to enter into a monastery or cloister. But even this decision is most often less about running away

from the threat of the world and more about running toward a deeper intimacy with Christ in a unique way. Most of us are not called to this kind of isolation. But all of us are called to be very careful about what we let into our homes, our families, and our heads.

I invite you to be smart about this. Be strategic. By now, you probably know the sources of temptation in your life. You know how temptations from “the world” enter in. Why not be bold about shoring up those parts of your life? If you know that you are more inclined to gossip with certain people, why not make some important decisions about those relationships? If you notice that you are more inclined to abuse alcohol in certain locations, why not make some important decisions about those locations? If you notice that you are inclined toward anger after watching certain media or listening to certain songs, then why not make some very specific choices about that media? But you have to think. And you have to be courageous. You have to be willing to change.

There are two other sources of temptations however; the fallen self and the devil. In next month’s column, we will look at how we can most effectively face these areas of temptation and emerge victorious.