

As always on the First Sunday of Lent, today's Gospel is the Temptation of Jesus in the desert. Today we heard Luke's account.

What's the significance of asking Jesus to turn stone into bread, showing him the kingdoms of the world, and then inviting him to jump off the temple tower and let the angels catch him?

These three seem to represent three disordered human desires. The temptation to turn stones into bread – that's the desire for pleasure. The desire to possess the kingdoms of the world - that's the desire for power and possessions. The third test seems to be a test of pride - a disordered love of self to the exclusion of the love of God.

These three temptations are like those of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. They wanted the forbidden fruit while keeping possession of the rest of the garden, and they wanted to be wise like God. Jesus seems to be undergoing each temptation of Adam and Eve, but Jesus is overcoming each one.

But today I don't want to talk about our human desires for pleasure, possessions, pride or power. Those powerful temptations do take their toll on us, and Lent gives us a season to sort out our progress in growing closer to God.

I want to talk about the sneakiest temptation in our world - the test - as in the Lord's Prayer in Luke's Gospel. It's not the one we usually pray - it ends with the line "do not subject us to the final test."

I think the most basic and sneakiest test is also the number one question not answered in any religious education class. It's not only the top question on the minds of our young people, many of whom have left the church, it's also the most basic question for all of us.

About 15 years ago as my mom approached death and her mind was clouded, she would have occasional moments of clarity. One morning, she asked me: "Jack, do you think there really is a God?" For her, that doubt was the final test.

"Is there a God?" is a huge question among all young people, because they are indoctrinated in all of our schools to worship at the altar of science, technology, engineering and mathematics. We've all heard lines like: "Science disproves religion." "Science is better than religion." "Old bible stories from the ancient world seem so crazy." "So much of religion is shaky and questionable." "Science seems so smart and testable and beneficial." "You have no proof that there even is a God."

Since I spent most of my working life involved in science, I feel qualified to comment with just one of the dozens of arguments for God's existence.

At the heart of all the sciences is the basic assumption that reality - our universe - is intelligible -it's capable of being understood or comprehended. It can be known. Reality has many patterns and forms that can be expressed in laws. If

the universe was just a big chaotic jumble, how could scientists approach it to figure it out? From the subatomic to the intergalactic, where does the order, pattern and intelligibility of the universe come from? Why does the universe allow us to describe its behavior using mathematics?

Einstein said that the most incomprehensible thing about the universe is that it *IS* comprehensible. Why does the universe have these incredibly intricate and complex patterns of intelligibility? It does, and that's why science can proceed.

Joseph Ratzinger once said that the only finally satisfying explanation for the intelligibility of our visible world, is that some intelligence has placed that order, those patterns, that intelligibility into the universe.

He also said that our language gives away this secret. When we come to know something, we say that we recognize it. Recognize - re-cognize - to think again. In new discoveries, scientists think again what's already been thought. But where did that first thought come from? John's Gospel explains it:

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be.*

The great claim of the Bible is that the world is NOT just a chaotic mess. The world can be understood by science because it was brought into being by a great primordial intelligence, the supreme being we call God.

It's no accident that modern science - that we all rightly respect and honor - emerged out of the great Christian universities of Europe. Modern science came from a world of thought that took God's creation for granted. The first great scientists were all devoutly religious people, and even today, scientists see that all of reality has been stamped by a primordial intelligence. All of the sciences rest upon the assumption that there is a law-like quality to reality.

So where do you think that the laws of nature come from? How do you explain that? That is a good question for so many of our young people, so that they might see the link between science and religion. Science and religion are not enemies. Religion is at the very heart of science, if you look at it the right way.

I'm sure that the question "Is there a God?" is going to be on the final test. Just a heads up - the answer is the first line of the Creed we're ready to pray. That answer might be a good topic for conversation today. Amen?

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- Deacon Jack Schaefer