

- You know...literalists will sometimes agonize a bit about how they should take those verses about cutting off hands and feet.
- Well...if amputation of body parts to prevent temptation was meant to be literal, we'd soon all be without hands, deaf, blind, etc.
- Jesus, of course, is simply using hyperbole—intentional exaggeration—to emphasize His point.

- Jesus here affirms the reality of sin—rebellion against God our Father—as well as reality of Hell...which, of course, the common wisdom says: you don't talk about that.
- But here it is in the mouth of God Himself. It only harms us to delude ourselves that it is not a reality.
- And Jesus is simply emphasizing common sense: that it is crucial to reject whatever in our lives that leads us away from God, and thus away from eternal life.
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- Are there any fishermen here?
- What happens with the fish? It circles...nibbles at the bait...and finally swallows the bait and the hook—only to be yanked up into the boat...to be fried up later.
- That is how Satan catches us. We tend to circle around a little suspicious...nibble at the bait...and before you know it, we're flopping on the bottom of his boat.
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- Now every day we pray: *“Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”*
- And yet Jesus also says: *“Temptations to sin are sure to come”*.
- Our prayer is asking God to minimize temptations, and to give us strength to resist them and to remain faithful to Him.
- And we know that He gives us that strength; St. Paul tells us: *“No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength... (1Cor 10:13 RSV)*
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- Satan can only tempt; we have the free will either to accept or to reject. To either accept God, or to accept evil.
- In fact, this free will is a requisite for God's justice; otherwise we would simply be computers operating according to programming, or animals acting on instinct.
- Animals are neither good nor evil...they simply act upon their instincts and, in part, according to their natural temperaments.
- But we choose. We plan...we look into the future and know in large part what lies in store for us along one path or the other.
- If a tiger kills and eats a human, he isn't looking ahead and thinking: "*Hmmm....if I eat that human, other humans may come to get me.*" He just knows that he's hungry and he acts on instinct.
- But we know that if we rob banks, the future may not be so rosy for us. There are always consequences to our actions.

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- What Jesus is saying when he says: "*Cut off your hand*" and "*cut off your foot*" is that we must reject what leads to sin...the flirting talk with married persons, the sticky fingers, the "*oh golly gee... how did I get to that website...but I'll just take a peek*".
 - The next thing you know you're flopping around on the bottom of Satan's boat...while he smiles and re-baits his hook.
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 - And Jesus also warns today: "*Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to him by whom they come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung round his neck and he were cast into the sea, than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin.*
(Luke 17:1-2 RSV)
 - When we hear this, how can we not sorrow at our world—so many causing sin...especially pornographers, those who glamorize extramarital sex or crime or drugs or whatever.
 - But, we, too, can be that one by whom temptation comes... dressing immodestly, carelessly doing the wrong for our own gain...making light of sin, or seeking to tempt others to do evil.
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- Because of concupiscence—the remnants of Original Sin—we are like a swimmer with a weight tied onto our foot; it is always tending to hold us back...always tending to drag us down.
- But we are called to a greater holiness; indeed, we are called to greatness in the family of God. Paul tells us: “*Do you not know that we are to judge angels?*” (1 Cor 6:3)
- ...and the more we surrender to God and obey His will—which IS to hold to what is truly good—we chip away at that weight, and less and less it drags us down...and the more we realize that greatness in our lives, and the contentment which comes only in knowing that we are walking the way of what is good and right—the way of Christ.
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- In the letter to the Hebrews we read: “*Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses [the angels and the saints], let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely...*” (Heb 12:1 RSV)
- This is where the cutting off of the hands and the feet comes in. Yes, amputation of what tempts us to sin may initially hurt...and it may hurt badly...but one must cut out a cancer to be healed.
- God says in scripture: “*‘And I will put [them] into the fire, and refine them as one refines silver, and test them as gold is tested. They will call on my name, and I will answer them. I will say, ‘They are my people’; and they will say, ‘The LORD is my God.’*” (Zechariah 13:9 RSV)
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- So...do we surrender to our passions, like animals in instinct...or do we listen to God’s Word?
- We have that free will to either accept or reject...and each day that choice lies before us.
- But, as Jesus points out today, the reality is...in the end, there is only Heaven and Hell...life and death...and as scripture says, we are given whichever we choose.
- But the love of God awaits us, like a fountain in a desert...if we accept it. His love is overflowing for those who love Him.

- As we hear in the book of Deuteronomy: *“Oh, that they had such a heart in them, that they would fear Me, and keep all My commandments always, that it may be well with them and with their children forever!”* (Deut 5:29)
- For: *“Light dawns for the righteous, and joy for the upright in heart. Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous, and give thanks to his holy name!”* (Psa 97:11-12 RSV)

Reading 1

[Nm 11:25-29](#)

The LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to Moses.

Taking some of the spirit that was on Moses,
the LORD bestowed it on the seventy elders;
and as the spirit came to rest on them, they prophesied.

Now two men, one named Eldad and the other Medad,
were not in the gathering but had been left in the camp.
They too had been on the list, but had not gone out to the tent;
yet the spirit came to rest on them also,
and they prophesied in the camp.

So, when a young man quickly told Moses,
"Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp, "
Joshua, son of Nun, who from his youth had been Moses' aide, said,
"Moses, my lord, stop them."

But Moses answered him,
"Are you jealous for my sake?
Would that all the people of the LORD were prophets!
Would that the LORD might bestow his spirit on them all!"

Responsorial Psalm

[Ps 19:8, 10, 12-13, 14](#)

R. (9a) The precepts of the Lord give joy to the heart.

The law of the LORD is perfect,
refreshing the soul;
the decree of the LORD is trustworthy,
giving wisdom to the simple.

R. The precepts of the Lord give joy to the heart.

The fear of the LORD is pure,
enduring forever;
the ordinances of the LORD are true,
all of them just.

R. The precepts of the Lord give joy to the heart.

Though your servant is careful of them,
very diligent in keeping them,
Yet who can detect failings?
Cleanse me from my unknown faults!

R. The precepts of the Lord give joy to the heart.

From wanton sin especially, restrain your servant;
let it not rule over me.
Then shall I be blameless and innocent
of serious sin.

R. The precepts of the Lord give joy to the heart.

Reading II

[Jas 5:1-6](#)

Come now, you rich, weep and wail over your impending miseries.
Your wealth has rotted away, your clothes have become moth-eaten,
your gold and silver have corroded,
and that corrosion will be a testimony against you;
it will devour your flesh like a fire.
You have stored up treasure for the last days.
Behold, the wages you withheld from the workers
who harvested your fields are crying aloud;
and the cries of the harvesters
have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.
You have lived on earth in luxury and pleasure;
you have fattened your hearts for the day of slaughter.
You have condemned;
you have murdered the righteous one;
he offers you no resistance.

Gospel

[Mk 9:38-43, 45, 47-48](#)

At that time, John said to Jesus,
"Teacher, we saw someone driving out demons in your name,
and we tried to prevent him because he does not follow us."
Jesus replied, "Do not prevent him.
There is no one who performs a mighty deed in my name
who can at the same time speak ill of me.
For whoever is not against us is for us.
Anyone who gives you a cup of water to drink
because you belong to Christ,
amen, I say to you, will surely not lose his reward.

"Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin,
it would be better for him if a great millstone
were put around his neck
and he were thrown into the sea.
If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off.
It is better for you to enter into life maimed
than with two hands to go into Gehenna,
into the unquenchable fire.
And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off.
It is better for you to enter into life crippled
than with two feet to be thrown into Gehenna.
And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out.
Better for you to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye
than with two eyes to be thrown into Gehenna,
where 'their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.'"