

# Avoid the seductive voice of the devil

By Father Joseph Breighner

Few moments in the Scriptures are more poignant than Jesus confronting Satan in the desert. In our Lenten season of prayer, fasting and giving we see this scene as our own scene. Ironically, one of my Lenten temptations came during the Christmas season. Let me explain.

As I was opening some Christmas cards, a check for \$1,000 fell out! Naturally I was thrilled, but when I looked more closely at the check I realized that the part that read: "Payable to the order of" was blank. "To be or not to be?" was the question Hamlet wrestled with. To put my name there, or not to put my name on the check, was what I wrestled with.

Naturally, the voice of the devil argued for me keeping the cash: "You don't get a salary. You need the money. It will help pay your rent. Stop denying yourself!" But the voice of conscience, the voice of the Spirit in me – the quiet, still voice of God – said: "You wanted to be a philanthropist. You asked people to mail checks to you so that you could send them to the Little Sisters of the Poor. Keep your word!"

So I mailed the check to the Little Sisters. (In the future, please mail checks directly to the Little Sisters. I lose too much mail. And they still need \$12.8 million for their capital campaign.)

I hasten to emphasize that good doesn't always win in my life. As long as there is original sin, there will be poor choices. (See my column about the Ravens online at [CatholicReview.org](http://CatholicReview.org).) Put in its simplest form, original sin means we can't always make the right choice.

But what does affect our choices? How do we know the still, quiet voice of God within from the very seductive voice of the devil? And the simplest answer I can give is that the voice of God constantly invites us to live for others, and the voice of the devil invites us to think only of ourselves.

Jesus said that the greatest commandment was to love God, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Yes, we must love ourselves. But the irony is this: We love ourselves best when we love others. To love ourselves doesn't mean just to look out for this limited ego, this flesh-and-blood individual on this planet. To love others as our self is literally to see that we are all part of one self. When we love others, we are loving and caring for ourselves. St. Paul caught it best when he used the image that we are all part of the body of Christ. When we love others, our love connects the whole world to this body. We recognize the oneness of all humanity.

To look at it another way, the purpose of Lent is not to make ourselves miserable. We don't give up something for a period of time, just to go back to it in six weeks. We give up our attachments to various things so that we are free. In its simplest form, during Lent, we first pray in order to keep ourselves aware of our oneness with God. Second, we fast. We give up things or behaviors that distract us from God or separate us from God. Third, we give alms as a way of recognizing that what we do "to the least" we do to God. To love ourselves and to love others unconditionally is to know the greatest love possible. We have all known the love of one person. Imagine loving 7 billion people. How good would that feel? Let's find out this Lent.