

Yogi Berra is well-known for a number of reasons. Yogi was a catcher for the New York Yankees for 19 years. He was a 15-time all-star, a 3-time Most Valuable Player. Yogi played in 14 World Series, winning ten of them. Yogi rarely struck out, and led the Yankees in runs-batted-in seven times while, by the way, playing along side of such legendary hitters as Mickey Mantle and Joe DiMaggio. Yogi was also a war veteran. He participated in the D-Day invasion during WWII.

Yogi is famous for many reasons. These days, however, with more and more baseball fans who never saw Yogi play, Yogi is better known for what are known as “Yogiisms,” quotations by Yogi Berra that fracture the English language in a provocative and interesting way.

Some famous Yogiisms are: “It’s so crowded in there, nobody goes there anymore,” “Tomorrow night is another day,” “I never said half the things I said,” and “We have a good time together, even when we’re not together.”

One of the more famous Yogiisms is “When you come to a fork in the road, take it.” Yogi says that this is part of the directions to his home, that on the way to his house there is a fork in the road, and either way you take, you’ll get to his house.

But I think this Yogiism also describes our experience with temptation. When faced with a temptation to do something we shouldn’t or to not do something we should, we’re faced with a choice. And when we’re not walking the road of temptation, it tends to be an easy choice. Why would you choose something wrong when you know what’s right? Why would you take even a step toward the path that leads to guilt, grief, broken relationships, prison time, or various other negative consequences?

But if you’ve ever found yourself walking the road of life and faced with a temptation (and, if you’re like everyone else on earth, you have), then you know that the choice at that point is not so easy; the choice to lie to a spouse, to steal from a friend, to gossip about a neighbor, to plot revenge, to complain, to turn on the internet when you’re home alone and look for sinful images again and again and again.

When faced with any temptation (whether those that plague you time and again or one that touches you just once), there is something about it that makes you want to take both roads. You know the good you ought to do, but there is at the same time a fluctuating desire to at least peek down the road that ought never interest you.

Why is that? And why is it that we more than often do so much more than peek? And what are we supposed to do when we take the wrong road and find the horrible consequences we should have known were at the end of that road? And what should we do the next time we face a fork in the road? Because I know one’s coming. They always do.

With many aspects of life, the more experience I have with something, the better I am able to deal with it. But with temptation, that doesn’t seem to be true. We face temptation every day, and every time we find ourselves at the same difficult fork in the road, where it is always a struggle, to say the least.

That is why the Sixth Petition is so very important. When we pray, “Lead us not into temptation,” we allow our Lord to address all these questions and to protect and comfort us as we walk this difficult road of temptation.

One of the reasons our fight against temptation often seems so impossible is because we are, quite literally, surrounded by enemies that would love nothing more than for us to walk directly into temptation. We are like a soldier trapped in a most desperate situation – with airplanes dropping bombs on us from above, ground troops advancing on us from around, and even traitors within our own camp secretly undermining our plans.

The devil, who the bible calls “the ruler of the kingdom of the air,” is a horrible enemy. He knows every one of your good plans and has every desire for you to do quite the opposite. He knows everything God wants, but what he wants is for you to spend your time doing everything else.

And this enemy knows exactly where to drop his bombs on your life. He knows your life better than you know your life. He knows your weaknesses, your soft spots, your daily schedule, where you have access to sinful temptations, and he knows how to lead you there while making you believe you are walking a very safe path.

Plus, this enemy never sleeps. He never needs to. And he never misplaces his information, forgets his game-plan, or becomes less evil.

The sinful world has already advanced on you and is surrounding you. Your friends tempt you to be lazy, your family tempts you to take sides, your television tempts you laugh at sin and laugh often, your magazines tempt you to be greedy, your neighbors tempt you to be angry. If you look at every aspect of this world you will find another potential temptation. And as long as you are alive, you are surrounded by this enemy who is so close that it even comes into your home, eats your food, and sleeps in your bed.

In addition to those, you have the traitor. In war movies, these are the people we hate. Often, the ending would be so different if there were not a traitor. The enemy could press all they wanted, but unless someone on the inside shows them an opening and exposes a vulnerability, the enemy would never get in and never win. But the traitor helps the enemy win and changes the ending.

You have a traitor, and the traitor is you. When the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 7, "I know that nothing good lives in me," he was calling himself a traitor and an enemy. "I have the desire to do what is good," he said, "but I cannot carry it out."

Sadly, we, like Paul, must make the same statement. Temptation has no power unless someone gives into it. The devil could tempt Eve all he wanted. But if she would have said "no," the ending would have been far different. The worldly wealth offered Judas could have been 10 times greater, but if he would have said "no" to that temptation, it would not be a sin, only temptation.

And whom did God hold accountable for Eve's sin? Was it the devil who tempted? The husband who consented? It was Eve who gave in. And for Judas? It was not those offering the money who said "yes." It was Judas and only Judas.

Likewise, God's holds only us accountable for our sins when we give in. The devil is always here, the pleasure of the world is always around, but there is no sin unless we give in. And sadly, we give in. Like a baby can't help but stuff anything it finds in its hands into its mouth, our sinful natures can't help but fill ourselves with sin when offered by temptation. And it's our fault.

"But that's not fair," you might say. "Everybody gives in. Everybody fails. There's no one who can realistically face every temptation I do, day in and day out, from all the people I see every day, never mind the devil I can't see but who still comes after me and get away from it all without giving in. You can't find one person."

Sure I can. Well, the writer to the Hebrews can. In chapter two he reminds us, that Jesus, human like you and me, "was tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin."

So maybe he can help us. He obviously knows how to beat the temptations since he never gave in. And he faced the same devil we do and was in the same world we are in. But ask yourself, why would he help us since he is also very truly God against whom we sin? We sin against him when we give in to temptation. Why would he help us?

I'll tell you why he would – because he already did. What good reason could Jesus have for placing himself in the middle of a tempting world and in front of an evil and powerful devil? Doing so obviously would not make his life easier, better, or more comfortable. In fact, it would have quite the opposite effect.

He put himself in that vulnerable position to make your sinful burden easier, your eternity better and far more comfortable. You owe God. Every one of your sins puts you in debt to God. And you don't have anywhere close to enough good in you to pay off a purely holy God for every sin you do and every good thing you don't do.

So Jesus paid that debt for you – by placing himself in our world, taking on flesh just like one of us, and offering his purely holy self on a cross to pay the debt owed by us. And God accepted his payment, which means you no longer owe God anything. Jesus helped you.

And if he helped you then, he will most certainly help you now, and our passage today tells you how. He knows what you go against. You fight against temptations that are common to every man who ever walked on earth, including the only holy man who ever walked on earth.

Jesus knows what tempts you, he experienced them all, and he helps you by identifying those things for you. Read through the Gospels and listen to how often Jesus warns you about tempting situations, places, and people. Listen to how often he and his Apostles tell you to flee, not play around with, not toe the line, but flee from all temptation.

And put those words into practice in your life. Identify what is tempting for you before you come to the fork in the road and make plans to never find it. If being home alone with an internet connection is tempting, don't be home alone with an internet connection. If working with money is tempting, find another job. And tell someone you trust about what you're doing so that you're not the only one reminding you of the words of Jesus, which also promise you that God will never leave you, that if he invested so much of himself in you already, he's not going to risk losing you before you reach eternity.

Our passage says "God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear." In other words, the devil isn't the only one who knows you. Your Father in heaven does too. And since he has already proven his strength over the devil, when the devil throws his worst at you, you can find comfort in that you have a more powerful ally working for you, making sure that what's tempting you isn't something that can overwhelm and crush you.

You can beat the temptation. Did you hear me? You can beat the temptation. Right now, you have the God-given strength to beat your temptation. Your new forgiven, loved, adored self can find comfort in the promise that, if you find yourself at a fork in the road, God has already given you the strength and ability to say "no" to the sinful road.

And any temptation you can't handle you won't see. It is kept at bay behind his mighty right hand and the wings of his angels, never to touch you, never to find you, never to tempt you.

"He will also provide a way out," the passage says. And that way out is never you. It is always finding comfort and strength in what your God and Savior has already done for you and will continue to do for you so that he can forever be with you.

Heavenly Father, we ask for forgiveness for the many times we allow the devil and the world to cause us to forget your wonderful promises of forgiveness for every sin and strength over every temptation. Use your holy Gospel to lift our burdens of guilt and to give strength to our mortal selves so that our lives may display the strength of your power and the depth of your love for all people. We pray in the name of Jesus, our Savior. Amen.