

1st Sunday of Lent - Luke 4:1-13

A woman once came to Mahatma Gandhi and asked him to please tell her son to give up his addiction to sugar. Gandhi asked the woman to bring the boy back in a week. Exactly one week later the woman returned, and Gandhi said to the boy, "Please give up eating sugar." The woman thanked Gandhi, and, as she turned to go, asked him why he had not said those words a week ago." Gandhi replied, "Because a week ago, I had not given up my habit of eating sugar."

It is clear from today's gospel that if we are to live as Christians, our lives will involve temptations. If Jesus was tempted, then certainly we shall be also.

What might be less clear from the gospel is that temptation is often founded on a dispute over how we should use our talents and our abilities.

When Jesus is led by the Spirit into the desert to prepare for his ministry, the devil comes and tries to tempt him to use his talents and gifts for his **own** sake rather than for God's purpose.

This text is not saying that our welfare and God's purpose are opposed. Usually when we do God's will we are also doing the best thing for ourselves. But the argument between Jesus and the devil is one over principle.

Who has real authority over Jesus' gifts and abilities? Is it Jesus' choice how he will use them or does God have the higher claim? Jesus rebuffs the devil's temptation and insists that God has the higher claim.

This gospel then calls us to consider who we really are and how our gifts and abilities should be used. Do we think that we have complete control over how we use our gifts and abilities, or do we think that God has the higher claim?

The answer for a Christian is clear. We believe that God is our creator and that everything we have comes as a gift from God. Our very life is a gift. We would not exist had not God granted us life.

The same is true for all that we do—our ability to think, our ability to work, our ability to run, to sing, to listen, to create—all of these abilities are gifts that God has given us.

The same is true of time. Every day that we are given is a gift, a gift that allows us to choose how we will live that day and what will we use it for.

For the Christian believer, the vision is clear. All that we are, all that we have comes from God. All is meant for God's glory. To a person that does not have faith, this is nonsense.

What I have, I have, and I use it as I want to use it—as long as it is not illegal or does not hurt other people. But the Christian perspective is different. It sees everything that we have as a gift which has been entrusted to us.

We are stewards of our own lives, of our own abilities, of our own time. And we know that God someday will ask us, “How did you spend your life? What did you do with the time, with the abilities and the talents that I gave you?”

All of us are tempted from time to time to imagine that we are independent of that responsibility. But the Christian knows better. He or she understands that we are all stewards of God's gifts.

Now I know that you all know this. This is not news to anyone. And yet it is a good thing every once in awhile for us to ask ourselves, “What kind of claim am I allowing God to have over my time and over my talents?”

The answer to that question will vary from time to time in our lives. Parents certainly are constantly called as stewards to use their time and talent in the raising of their children.

All of us are called as family members and friends to use our abilities to build unity and joy within our families and in our relationships.

All of us feel called from time to time to give of ourselves to our community. The same is true of our church community.

The simple truth is that we could not function as a parish unless many people gave of their time and talent to make our ministries and our life together possible.

Our parish should not be compared to a department store or gas station. It would make me the proprietor of a business and you the customers. But we are not a business. We are a parish, a community, a family in which together we share our talents and our abilities so that we can grow to know Christ better.

We are so blessed at St. Michael to have so many people who live according to that vision. We have hundreds of people who give of their time and talent.

There are over fifty ministries that are active in our parish. Yet every so often it is important for us as a parish to highlight areas where there is still need.

There are hundreds of reasons why at this time you do not have either the gift or the time we need. That discernment is between you and the Lord.

The only thing that I am asking, and the only thing I must ask you to do, is to consider: “What kind of a claim am I allowing God to have over my time and talent?”

It is an important question. It is a question that's very appropriate to this season of Lent, when we try to be better disciples. We are stewards of everything that we have.

So, reflect today, "Is God calling me to use more of my time and talent in any area of my life?" Of course, if you discern that God is calling you, I would suggest you respond. AMEN.