



*Dear Parishioners,*

How often do we make a remark and almost immediately we wish we could take it back? How often do we regret not doing something that we should have done? In both these cases and in many more, we regret the choices we made. Temptations to speak and act in certain ways force us to make choices, even if only simply the choice to think before we speak or act. We would like to imagine that we can walk away from temptation and protect ourselves from having to make choices, especially when the temptation is serious and the choice difficult. But even walking away from temptation is a choice. We cannot avoid temptations in our lives. Nor can we avoid choices. Even Jesus had to face temptations as this weekend's Gospel indicates. What we learn from Him is how to make faithful choices in the face of temptation. We also learn from Him what effect our choices have on us and on others.

Saint Mark's version of the temptation in the desert is short and to the point. He does not relay the details of Jesus' experience of temptation, but he does show its outcome. Jesus boldly enters Galilee proclaiming, "This is the time of fulfillment. The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the Gospel." Temptations always force us to make a choice. Jesus' choice is to take up His saving mission. What is our temptation? What is our choice? These are *the* questions of Lent. They are the questions those of us who are baptized into Christ (see Second Reading) must constantly ask if we wish to participate in His saving mission, proclaiming by the choices we make that the Gospel ... the Good News ... determines who we are and how we act.

Confronting temptation and overcoming the sinfulness that keeps us from righteous Christian living is a necessary first step for our faithful baptismal living. We must turn from sinfulness before we can do our part to continue Jesus' mission. Since repentance, forgiveness, and belief are so central to Christian living, proclaiming the Gospel at least means that we turn from our sinful ways, forgive others, and express our belief by saying "yes" to God's will for us. None of these is easy to do, which is why proclaiming the Gospel is a lifelong mission. The most eloquent proclamation of the Gospel is the witness of the way we live. Ultimately, what we witness to is the "time of fulfillment" brought about by believing in and living the Gospel.

The first two readings of this weekend suggest that making good choices in the face of temptation and the command to proclaim the Gospel are part of our baptismal response. In the baptismal waters we are plunged into the death of Christ to rise to the risen Life that renews the earth. Baptism is our entry into the death & Resurrection mystery of Jesus Christ. We begin Lent by reminding ourselves that we are a baptized people. At the end of Lent we renew our baptismal promises at the Easter Vigil and on Easter Sunday.

Our baptismal identity with Jesus Christ confers on us the same mission as Jesus Himself ... to proclaim the Gospel of God. We should know full well that we never will be rid of temptations and sinfulness. But this fact of the human condition ought not to keep us from taking up our baptismal mission to proclaim the Gospel by what we say, by what we do, and by who we are. We proclaim the Gospel not because we are sinless, but because we have aligned ourselves with Jesus Christ. Our Lenten desert affords us the opportunity to examine how well we have aligned ourselves with Christ.

May Saint Michael the Archangel defend, guide, and intercede for us always!

*Fr. Larry Polansky, Pastor*