

First Sunday of Lent
March 1, 2020

When I was a seminarian, I was having a great discussion with Fr. Mike Burke, the Vocation Director for the Diocese, about the challenges of living a celibate life. He said, "Gary, you will always have the opportunity, and you will always have the temptation. You just pray they don't happen at the same time." But they often do, don't they!? Temptations and opportunities often do happen at the same time, and in those moments, it serves us well to know the difference.

Your teacher hands back the test and you realize she missed one of your mistakes. Opportunity or temptation? You notice your co-worker, one you don't like that much, made an error that you could easily fix. Opportunity or temptation? You get the check at the restaurant and the waiter forgot to include the bar tab. Opportunity or temptation?

The one and only way to know in those moments is to know who we are and who we are called to be. If we know that, the rest becomes clear.

Adam and Eve, the everyman and everywoman, had yet to understand what it meant to be a child of God, the difference between being created in God's image and thinking we can be "God." So, was the fruit of the tree an opportunity or a temptation? The opportunity to be what God had created them to be or the temptation to be more than that?

Jesus, the "second Adam," as St. Paul wrote, having been baptized in the Jordan River was declared God's beloved Son. He was human in every way so he knew that every human hunger would be a part of his life. So, when he was hungry and the devil urged him to turn stones into bread, was it an opportunity or a temptation?

Given the possibility of throwing himself off the temple and allowing the angels to protect him: Opportunity or temptation? Years later, hanging on the cross, he faced the same: "If you are the Son of God, save yourself and us." But in his deepest sense of self, he came to know that sacrifice would be a part of his life, in fact, the very thing that God sent him to do.

Confronted with power to control all the nations of the earth: Opportunity or temptation? As a man, such power would be enticing, even appealing. As the Christ, though, he would have far greater power, the power over life and death itself. He understood who he was and who God called him to be.

If we want to see clearly the distinction of opportunity and temptation in our lives, we must begin with knowing who we are as daughters and sons of God. We must remember what it means to be called by God to proclaim justice and live compassion, to walk through life as a servant of God. What it means to leaders of reverence and the respect of every life, to create a world where there is no longer Us vs. Anyone. We must know what it means to be called to love our enemies and forgive our persecutors, and to believe that the very spirit of God lives within everyone.

When we truly know who we are as children of God, as the Body of Christ, as dwellings of the Holy Spirit, we have everything we need to grow in holiness, in grace and in peace. It gives us everything we need to fulfill God's plan in our lives. And it keeps the line between temptation and opportunity clearly drawn, even when they happen at the same time, as they often do.