

Dear Friends,

How capable are we of always choosing to do what is right and avoiding what is sinful in our lives? God has blessed us with useful tools to help form and guide our consciences so that we can make decisions that will be consistent with God's will, and at the same time, will be what is best for our well being. Our consciences are intimately connected with another gift God has given us: the gift of free will. When we use these gifts together, I believe we have the potential to become saints; we learn to live exemplary lives of faith, devotion, compassion and mercy, lives that are completely Christ-like.

Still, we sin. This reality proves that at times we do not utilize our consciences as effectively as we can, especially when we are confronted with the possibility of making a choice between doing good and avoiding evil. We have other character traits, personality types and styles of decision making that develop over time to become habits. When confronted with a decision one of the first things we do, and there is always an element of truth in this, is we begin to think it through. This process can happen in the blink of an eye – we are fearfully and wonderfully made. Often times, however, this thinking process evolves into rationalization. When we begin to rationalize, the temptation to do something that we know can be wrong or hurtful becomes so right, we wonder how we could have ever doubted ourselves.

The good news is, however, that we have a toolbox to help us in times of temptation. Sometimes we just don't want to open that box. If we have listened carefully to the gospel story for this weekend, we see that even Jesus himself was tempted. He was tempted to eat when he had made the commitment to fast. He was tempted to seek comfort for himself when he had committed his life to serving the needs of the poor. He was tempted with power even though he devoted his life to complete obedience to God's will, even though that meant a life of powerless submission to torture and death. Still, he resisted the temptations, he remained steadfast in his human will to being faithful to God. You might say, "Well, he is God." Yes, that is true. But in his time of fasting and prayer he was in his human form and he was limited to a human response to the temptations he faced. In seeing that Jesus was able to resist temptation we can see that it is possible for us as well.

Jesus turned to prayer. In his journey to the desert he completely emptied himself of his ego, his personal desires for food, water, and all other necessities for human life. In doing this Jesus had to trust completely in the love of God to keep him alive. This

prayer of abandonment is a helpful tool for us as well; it helps us to trust that God's love will guide us in making the right choices in our lives.

When Jesus was tempted he turned to the Sacred Scriptures which helped him formulate the best response. His life as a Jewish man was rooted in Torah, God's Law given to Moses. He knew the Sacred Scriptures well and he used them to advise and form his conscience when it came time to respond to Satan's temptations. The Sacred Scriptures, used prayerfully, can also be a source of great insight for us when we are tempted. I'm not advocating the idea that our lives must be completely ruled and determined by what the Bible says. I am saying, though, that the Sacred Scriptures are insightful and they can help us to make good decisions.

Jesus had his strength of will and the convictions of his faith; nothing would deter him from remaining steadfast to those convictions, not even starvation. Not even the cunning and powerful Satan himself was able to persuade Jesus to change his mind.

We have a lot of other tools in our toolboxes. We can always ask questions. It's always a good idea to seek the advice of a spiritual advisor who can offer wisdom when we are confused. We have the Sacraments of the Church, especially the Mass and Reconciliation, to nourish us along the way. We have wonderful devotions like the Stations of the Cross, Eucharistic Adoration, and times of quiet prayer, to console us when we struggle. Here is a nice idea for us as we begin the Lenten season: try taking an inventory of all the good tools we have in helping us to live holy, Christian lives. Think about them and examine them in the mind's eye. Ask about how willing we are to use the tools God gives us. We will find that we are indeed quite capable of always choosing to do what is right and avoiding what is sinful in our lives. God has indeed been very good to us in providing all we need to help us be holy people. We just need to know the gifts we have. We must put those gifts to good use, especially in times of temptation.

In joyful hope,
Fr. Tim Seigel