

## YOU'RE ENTITLED

### *Sermon for Lent1C—Lk 4: 1-13*

LPC, 2/17/13

To what are you entitled?

The answer to that question will of course vary according to context. As American citizens, we are entitled to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, according to our Constitution. Our other laws entitle us to other rights and privileges, like the right to vote and to own property.

A baptized Christian is further entitled: Christians are entitled to the sacraments of the Church.

An adult member in good standing of Lawrencefield Parish Church is entitled to additional rights and privileges, specifically, to voice and vote in the running of this parish.

Who, would you say, is entitled to access God's forgiveness and unconditional love? That's easy. The only prerequisite to that particular entitlement is being human.

Considering to what you are entitled to is the gateway to tremendous freedom. An abused spouse's first step to freedom is realizing that she is entitled to live without constant fear. An addict's first step to recovery is realizing that he is entitled, through God's mercy, to the blessings of sobriety. An oppressed class of people finds the strength to fight for emancipation in the realization that they are entitled to the same rights as their oppressors.

But considering what you are entitled to should come with a warning label.

Considering what you are entitled to can also be the gateway to tremendous sin. Today's Gospel lesson from Luke tells us as much.

You know this story. Immediately after being baptized by John the Baptist, Jesus is "led by the Spirit" into the desert to fast and pray in solitude before he begins his public ministry. (Incidentally, I wonder what would happen if clergy today were required to fast and pray for 40 days before beginning a new ministry?)

The devil appears to Jesus in his privation, and offers three temptations: physical sustenance, worldly power, and spiritual privilege, even quoting scripture to win Jesus over. Jesus answers with scripture of his own and withstands the devil's temptations.

What's interesting about Luke's version of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, is that the devil twice prefaces his enticements by saying, "IF you are the Son of God...." The devil is appealing to Jesus' entitlement.

There's no "if" about it. Jesus is the Son of God, and the devil knows it. This means if anyone is entitled to anything, Jesus is.

Now what does it mean to be the Son of God? Because in human terms a son is always, at least initially, less powerful than his father, we may have a tendency to think that Jesus is somehow less God than God the Father. This is not true. Jesus is fully God. He demonstrates this throughout the Gospels in his command over the forces of nature, in his healings and miracles.

Then too, because a son is always younger than his father, and because the Son of God was born as a human being, Jesus, at a certain point in time, we may assume that Son came *after* the Father. This is also not true, though it may be hard to get your head around it. Christian doctrine teaches that the Son (and the Spirit, for that matter) are coeternal with God the Father, meaning that the Holy Trinity existed in its entirety from before time and forever. The Son was incarnated as a human being at a certain point in time, was born, lived, and died, but never ceased to be fully God. This is a fine but important theological point.

What it means in the context of today's story, is that Jesus is really not only God's Son but fully God, and therefore entirely entitled to physical sustenance (since he has after all appeared in human form), worldly power and spiritual privilege. Jesus is absolutely entitled to turn stones to become bread, rule over all the kingdoms of the world, and be borne up by angels. He chooses not to exercise those entitlements, because only in facing what every other human being faces could he redeem what every other human being faces.

His example in not claiming every privilege to which he is entitled can be a lesson to other human beings:

Human beings like the woman who decides not to report all her income on her income tax because she's entitled to what she's earned by the sweat of her brow. Yes, she is entitled to what she earns, but not at the expense of the responsibilities of citizenship.

Human beings like the husband in an unhappy marriage who feels he is entitled to a little happiness when presented with an opportunity to be unfaithful to his wife. Yes, he's entitled to happiness, but not at the expense of his marriage.

Human beings like the friend who is entitled to the last word in an argument. Yes, you are entitled to your opinion, but there are times when you hold your tongue, in love.

We are entitled to life, but sometimes, for some of us, love calls us to lay it down. We are entitled to liberty, but we voluntarily covenant ourselves to the people we love, so that we don't actually have liberty to do absolutely everything we want. We are entitled to happiness, but everyone from parents to soldiers to people in service professions put the happiness of others second to their own, in love.

In the end we generally find that all our entitlements are limited or conditional, except for one, and that is the love of God. That particular entitlement alone is absolute and inviolate.