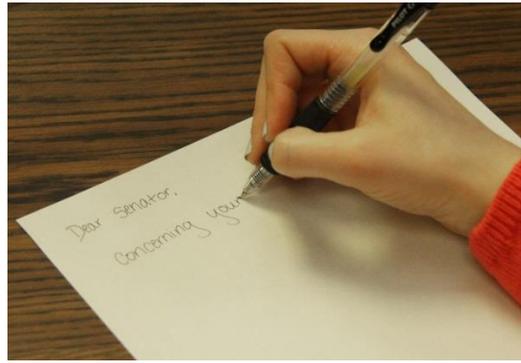


THE CULTURE OF TEMPTATION

February 14, 2016 (DT 26:4-10, ROM 10:8-13, LK 4:1-13)

Last month I emailed my federal representatives asking, at the request of the U.S. Catholic Bishops' Conference, to extend the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) (it is an effective safety net for the working poor). One representative replied how he/she has always supported the EITC. Another thanked me for my letter and would consider my argument if extending the EITC came across his or her desk.



Both senators voted against the spending and tax bill (they said for reasons that had nothing to do with the EITC). My congressperson voted for it.

Not long afterward, one representative sent out a triumphant email that the efforts to defund Planned Parenthood (an effort supported by the Catholic bishops because more than 90% of its revenue comes from performing abortions, which is not a "critical health service" for women) were stopped "for now."

This was also part of the tax and spending bill that the representative had opposed.

The deaf ear tuned to these two issues reminded me that being a Catholic engaged in the political arena is a difficult responsibility.

In today's Gospel reading, the devil entices Jesus with three temptations, each with increasing desirability. That Jesus withstood these temptations underscores his purpose to exist for the good of humanity, and not for his own grandeur or gratification.

Avoiding the culture of self is contrary to the current of the magnetic pull drawing society away from the common good and toward a selfish outlook.

This selfish perspective begins with the thought that we're not good enough. It grows into the belief of every person for their self until it ends with the rationalization that "everyone does it."

This selfish attitude is the antithesis of Catholic social teaching.

The teachings of our faith guide us away from a culture of "me" and towards the good of humanity. Our teachings provide us with the criteria for our advocacy:

1. Does it protect human life and dignity?
2. Does it promote the common good (the good of humanity)?

When we advocate according to these criteria, we take solace in the words of St. Paul, "For one believes with the heart [that Jesus is Lord] and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved." That is, the words that tumble from our mouths in the political arena are entirely consistent with Jesus, our Lord's message of mercy and justice; our words confess this.

Politics, the relationship between individuals and the bodies they establish to govern relationships, is a reflection of Morality. For example, our budgets are moral documents that must reflect our cherished principles.

We will find it difficult to prevail on isolated issues. To succeed in changing policies, we must first succeed in changing the culture from one of "me first" to "us first." to a culture that protects life and dignity, and promotes the common good.

We must first change the culture that reflects the cherished principles that life is not a commodity and that the working poor deserve our help.

