

### FRANK SINATRA! I DID IT MY WAY

Way in the past, farther than most of us care to admit, we can remember Frank Sinatra singing his unforgettable song, "I Did It My Way." In some ways, it might have been his signature song.

*And now, the end is near, and so I face the final curtain.  
My friend, I'll say it clear. I'll state my case, of which I'm certain*

*I've lived a life that's full. I traveled each and every highway  
And more, much more than this, I did it my way.*

*I planned each charted course, each careful step along the byway.  
And more, much more than this, I did it my way.*

The Gospel for this first Sunday of Lent is about Jesus going into the desert where he fasted, ate nothing, and prayed for forty days in that barren waste. And then the devil came to tempt him. He first said that "If you are the son of God, command this stone to become bread. Jesus answered "It is written, one does not live on bread alone." The devil then showed Jesus in an instant all the kingdoms of the world claiming that he had charge of them, but that if Jesus would just worship him as being what he claimed to be, he would give them all to him. Jesus again answered: "You shall worship the Lord, your God, and him alone shall you serve." And finally, the devil took Jesus to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple, a certain parapet, and said, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here for it is written, He will command his angels that they will support you, lest you dash your foot against a stone." Jesus once again responded: "You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test. With that, the devil vanished, and Jesus then came out of the desert to begin his public life.

What has all this to do with Frank Sinatra and his song? Within each human being is an instinct to go it alone, to be one's own boss, to make it to the end one's own way, owing nothing to anyone else. Jesus was God made man, totally God while at the same time being totally man. As a man, he had all the same instincts that everyone has at one time or another. It is part of being human the way God created man to be. Part of all this is the fact that God gave man total freedom, freedom to do whatever he wants, good or bad. Why give a gift that is so absolute? Because without absolute freedom it is impossible to truly love another.

Freedom is a wonderful gift but it can certainly lead a person to do absurd things, even to taking chances involving their life. It can also lead one to think that they are above the law, that no one has a right to tell them what or how to act or do something. It is a deep instinct to "Do It My Way." Like it or not, everyone at one time or another feels this instinct and is often tempted to act on it. At times one does follow it and at other times ignores it. Yet it is always there in the background.

Jesus as a man certainly must have felt this basic instinct. And it was as a man that the Devil tempted him. As God, this could not happen, but the very fact that Jesus was tempted, points out loud and clear that Jesus is truly like each and every one of us and does understand

our total makeup. In each of the three temptations note that each one points to an easy way to accomplish the final goal of Jesus as Savior and Redeemer. To turn a stone into bread would satisfy his hunger and at the same time allow him to go out and with full strength begin his work of redemption. But Jesus was also God and his basic instinct was that he was to do it all God's way, not his way.

In the second temptation where the devil acts as if he owned the entire world and all those living on it he is willing to give a part of it, or even all of it to make it so much easier for Jesus to accomplish his ultimate goal. This is certainly a way to get it all done without much effort. How often one is tempted to take the easy way out rather than to do it right the hard way. Work is always somewhat hard and like it or not, one is almost always subconsciously looking for an easy way which in reality does not exist. Christ knew that his way was certainly not the easy way, but it was what his Father asked of him. The third and final temptation is another easy way out. Do something so extraordinary that everyone will be convinced you are really somebody and they will automatically follow you. Show yourself to be above the average. Use the powers you have to impress people, not necessarily to help them.

Christ had a mission not just to save a fallen human race but also to teach people how to really live. His teaching was of course primarily through his preaching. Huge crowds came to hear him and they hung on every word he said. But many also came to see him work miracles rather than listen to his message. These were thrill seekers rather than people of open heart willing to learn and even more willing to follow and to live a new life, one filled with faith in Christ and one which promised them a whole new outlook filled with true joy. The words of Christ were powerful indeed. But Christ also taught through his example. He totally lived what he preached. There was no end to his love and kindness, and even when he was insulted, as he was on numerous occasions by his detractors and by those in power who had nothing but disdain for him he never fought back on their level but showed what true Christian tolerance was and even more importantly, what true forgiveness was.

Thus this story about the beginning of Christ's mission with a forty day retreat in the desert, shows us his humanity as well as his divinity. As truly a man he felt the temptations but he also saw through them to realize they were not coming from his heavenly Father. They were coming from the arch enemy of God, the devil and his minions. In each temptation, the devil quoted scripture hoping to make his suggestion more palatable. But note how Christ also used scripture to refute each temptation, overcoming the devil on his own terms. This should teach us that when we are tempted, be it to do some small peccadillo or some big misdeed, we need the help of our Lord. To think that we have the strength and the will to be able to overcome every temptation is itself allowing one to fall for a lie of the evil one. Our strength should be based on our faith in God and our love for the Lord Jesus, not based on our ego or our conviction that we can succeed by doing it our way.

At the beginning of Lent, our Church does very well in presenting this Gospel for our instruction and our faith. This in many ways shows that Christ is, has been, and always will be very much in the forefront in guiding his Church in the way of God and not in the ways of human beings. Yet at the same time, Christ works through humans, even through their weaknesses, to help his followers to constantly draw closer and closer to him. He never forces himself on us but he is mighty clever in drawing us to follow him ever more closely. This demands that we be constantly open to him, not just a little but totally. That in itself is something to pray about during Lent! It is not easy, but with Christ on our side it will happen

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