

Readings for March 10, 2019 -- First Sunday in Lent

Desert Places

Jesus faces temptations but rejects them, unlike the Genesis account of Adam and Eve. We all face tempting offers that might seem okay, but ultimately lead us away from God. This season of Lent invites us to go into the desert with Jesus, to spend more time with him, and to be strengthened to live our lives as one who is "led by the Spirit."

Opening Prayer:

Lord, Jesus, you fasted for forty days in the desert, opening yourself up to your Father's will before you began your public ministry. Help me practice fasting with a spirit of openness to the Father's will, so that I may be more sensitive to the needs of others and remain focused on my baptismal call to holiness. Amen
(Joe Paprocki, Loyola Press)

Opening Thoughts:

Take a few minutes to think about some ways you can be "in the desert" with Jesus this coming week. What does the desert symbolize? What does this image mean for you, or relate to your life right now. How can something sparse and dry help to bring about fruitfulness? (*Write down a few words or thoughts below, then share about this with the group, if you are willing*)

Reading 1 DT 26:4-10

Moses spoke to the people, saying: "The priest shall receive the basket from you and shall set it in front of the altar of the LORD, your God.

Then you shall declare before the Lord, your God, my father was a wandering Aramean who went down to Egypt with a small household and lived there as an alien.

But there he became a nation great, strong, and numerous.

When the Egyptians maltreated and oppressed us, imposing hard labor upon us, we cried to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and he heard our cry and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression.

He brought us out of Egypt with his strong hand and outstretched arm,

with terrifying power, with signs and wonders; and bringing us into this country, he gave us this land

flowing with milk and honey. Therefore, I have now brought you the firstfruits of the products of the soil which you, O LORD, have given me.' And having set them before the Lord, your God, you shall bow down in his presence."

Responsorial Psalm PS 91:1-2, 10-11, 12-13, 14-15.

R. (cf. 15b) **Be with me, Lord, when I am in trouble.**

You who dwell in the shelter of the Most High,
who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,
say to the LORD, "My refuge and fortress,
my God in whom I trust."

R. **Be with me, Lord, when I am in trouble.**

No evil shall befall you,
nor shall affliction come near your tent,
For to his angels he has given command about you,
that they guard you in all your ways.

R. **Be with me, Lord, when I am in trouble.**

Upon their hands they shall bear you up,
lest you dash your foot against a stone.
You shall tread upon the asp and the viper;
you shall trample down the lion and the dragon.

R. **Be with me, Lord, when I am in trouble.**

Because he clings to me, I will deliver him;
I will set him on high because he acknowledges my name.
He shall call upon me, and I will answer him;
I will be with him in distress;
I will deliver him and glorify him.

R. **Be with me, Lord, when I am in trouble.**

Reading 2 ROM 10:8-13

Brothers and sisters: What does Scripture say?

The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart

—that is, the word of faith that we preach—, for, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved.

For the Scripture says, *No one who believes in him will be put to shame.*

For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all,

enriching all who call upon him. For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Gospel LK 4:1-13

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert for forty days, to be tempted by the devil.

He ate nothing during those days, and when they were over he was hungry.

The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." Jesus answered him, "It is written, *One does not live on bread alone.*"

Then he took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a single instant.

The devil said to him, "I shall give to you all this power and glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I may give it to whomever I wish.

All this will be yours, if you worship me." Jesus said to him in reply,

"It is written: *You shall worship the Lord, your God, and him alone shall you serve.*"

Then he led him to Jerusalem, made him stand on the parapet of the temple, and said to him,

"If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written:
He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,
and: *With their hands they will support you, lest you dash your foot against a stone.*"
Jesus said to him in reply, "It also says, *You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.*"
When the devil had finished every temptation, he departed from him for a time.

Related Reflections

"The sin underneath all our sins is to trust the lie of the serpent that we cannot trust the love and grace of Christ and must take matters into our own hands." (Martin Luther)

Praying in the Desert

It always surprises me how often the Gospels say that Jesus needed to "withdraw" from the crowds, and even the disciples, to pray. Like all of us, Jesus needed prayer, in his case, with the Father. And while the Gospels don't afford us much access to Jesus' inner life, we know that his prayer was real: that is, he truly sought help from the Father.

We also know that Jesus was really tempted. After his baptism, the Gospels describe Jesus as being "driven" or "led" into the desert for a period of testing. In Matthew and Luke we read the familiar incidents of Satan tempting Jesus in three ways: to turn stones into bread (to feed himself), to throw himself from a high tower (to prove God's loving care), and to worship Satan (in exchange for power and glory).

Like the most difficult temptations in our own lives, Jesus' temptations were cloaked in apparent goodness. Why wouldn't you want to feed yourself? Why not let God show you love? Why not acquire some wealth and power? The most tempting temptations rarely appear 100 percent evil, for then they would be easy to identify and reject. After much prayer, Jesus realized that giving into these lures would prevent him from becoming the person he was meant to be.

In the desert of our temptations, our lives can seem dry indeed. But if we follow the voice of conscience, and remember that God is always with us, we can, like Jesus, reject anything that leads us from becoming the flourishing person God wants us to be.

(Fr. James Martin, S.J. *In All Seasons, For All Reasons*, Liturgical Press)

The Gospel of the first Sunday of Lent each year (Mt 4:4-11, Mk 1:12-15, or Lk 4:1-13) presents us with an intimate look at the heart and mind of Jesus. He is alone in the desert—we are told he fasts and is tempted by Satan. There are no eyewitnesses to these events; we take them as revealed to the Gospel writer, truly inspired by the Holy Spirit. Jesus teaches us about living a life of holiness, which includes sacrifice, and sacrifice means resisting temptations.

His fasting does not make him weaker, but in his sacrifice he is strengthened all the more to resist Satan's temptations. At the beginning of Lent, the faithful are encouraged by Jesus' example of discipline and strengthened by our solidarity with him during our own 40 days "in the desert."

The desert, biblically and mystically, is not so much a physical place, a geography, as a place in the heart. The desert is that place where we go to face our demons, feel our smallness, be in a special intimacy with God, and prepare ourselves for the promised land... Jesus shows us that in order to be filled by God, one must first be emptied. (from Fr. Ron Rolheiser – St. Louis Univ. Center for Liturgy website)

Discussion Questions

- How can we do more to find our own “desert places” during Lent so we can hear God more clearly?
- Recall a time when you experienced the “desert” or “wilderness” in your life. What did you learn about yourself? What did you learn about God? What (or who) helped to bring you out of the desert?
- What temptations might you face that keep you from being the person God created you to be?
- Part of the deceit of sin is to blind us from seeing it for what it really is – deceit. (*To Walk with Christ*, Laurence L. Gooley, S.J.) What things of the world can deceive us into forgetting that they are sinful?
- How do we get caught up into thinking some things of the world (things that are not of God) are okay?
- What happens when we keep our eyes fixed on God, as Jesus does?

Closing Prayer:

Lord God, in the midst of the busyness of life, help me to slow down and carve out time for conversation with you, just as I make time for other important relationships in my life. Remind me to take opportunities throughout the day to be present with you. Amen (From Jesuitprayer.org)

"You don't have to be worthy, you only have to be willing." (Padre Pio)

Suggested Music

Every Little Prison (Matt Maher)

I Shall Not Want (Audrey Assad)

Healing Begins (Tenth Avenue North)