

First Sunday of Lent – 2010 Cycle C - A Desert Experience:

We have begun our journey into our 2010 Lenten. Beginning a few days ago on Ash Wednesday and going until Wednesday of Holy Week we have started a quest to Easter Sunday. And there are many different ideas of a quest, of a journey. We, as Catholics, have understood Lent as a journey of penance, of reflection, of service and forgiveness. We have also believed that the desert is a significant part of our journey, be that a symbolic one. Our first sentence in today's gospel we hear "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.

I think there are 3 significant points just in this first sentence. Jesus is filled with the Holy Spirit, he is led to a barren place and he is tempted. This sums up most of our Lent pretty well.

First before entering the desert, Jesus is filled with the Holy Spirit, is filled with the presence of God. Before His temptations, before Christ can even begin to experience this test of Himself, He must be filled with God. When we begin our Lenten journey, when we enter our desert, we have allowed God to enter us, in our own way. Each and every one of us has a different journey to begin. But each of us needs to have the Spirit of God in us as we begin it.

The desert has always been a place of temptation, a place of trial and a place of renewal. The desert is a place of emptiness. It is a place that is unforgiving if not treated with its due respect. It is a place where you must give up your own ideas of what you want out of it and accept what it is giving you. If you think you are going to move into the desert and plant a nice garden that needs some very specific caring with regards to water and temperature, that garden will not be very success. A desert is a place that we need to abandon ourselves and live simply and sparingly. We are being called this February 2010 to empty ourselves and be renewed. Easier said than done, but just the same something that we are being called to do. We are not being called to a place of comfort where we can continue to live as we do. We are not being asked to follow the same script that we have been following throughout our lives. We need to get out of our comfort zone, change the same old pattern that we have been following to find God and let God renew us. We enter this desert with only the Spirit in us and allow and trust that Spirit to

guide us to God. As Tessa Bielecki writes, “The call of the desert is God's call to the intimate depths of every human heart. As we hear through the prophet Hosea, ‘I will lead you into the desert, and there I will speak to your heart’ (Hosea 2:14).”

“...to be tempted by the devil”. One of my favorite movies is **G.I. Jane** and one of my favorite parts is when the main character, is asked by her drill sergeant, while she's doing push ups in the surf of the Atlantic Ocean, what is good about pain. After telling him that she does not know, he tells her that it helps her know that she's not dead yet. We have many tests throughout our lives, some really hurt and our painful and some not so much. But most of our tests, if they are truly a deep and meaningful test, bring us out of ourselves and make us new. Christ after being lead into the desert for 40 days is then tested. He would have been weak and tired and lacked some ability to think clearly, yet comes through it following the will of God. Not only are we hopefully going to be tested this Lent, we are asking to be tested.

A lot of us stepped into this or another church a few days ago, received ashes on our foreheads and asked, without words, “test me God”. We have voluntarily entered our desert with the Holy Spirit in us and begun our Lent. May this Lent be the best and most fulfilling Lent that we have ever had. Do not let the good programs that we have at St. Ann's go by without using them to help our journey. But also do not let these programs take over for your desert experience. Do not let go of the things in life that keep you from a deeper relationship with God, and only fill it with something else, even though they are good. A desert is a place of emptying. It is a place that will allow us to get rid of the things in our life that fill it besides God. We are finite beings. There is a limit to what we can retain and keep. It is a delicate balance that needs to be checked from time to time and this is the time. Now! Not tomorrow and not next week and certainly not next Lent. Not only can this Lent make us feel we are not dead yet, but it can also make us feel that we are alive! To be alive in Christ and to live life as Love, Passion and with Intensity! And not like a hamster on a wheel.