



First Week of Lent

March 1 through March 7, 2009

Journeying Through Lent A Time of Desert Experiences

Use this resource alone or with others. Used with others, read the reflections aloud, pausing between them. Invite each member of the group to take a turn reading, or prepare readers in advance for larger groups. Share with each other your Lenten commitments and promises, keeping within the silence of your own heart those things which belong only there.

Opening Ritual & Prayer

Light a candle. Open your Bible and set it beside the lit candle. Prepare the room for prayer, even if you are alone. Quiet music can help to settle yourself and others after a hectic day.

Leader: Let us bless the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

Leader: God bless our journey throughout this Lent

All: God, be with us as we travel

Leader: May our Lenten fasting be a hunger for justice.

All: Our alms a making of peace.

Leader: Our prayer, the chant of humble and grateful hearts.

All: Amen

Read aloud to yourself, or have various members of the group read aloud the Scripture Readings for the First Sunday of Lent (Year B):

Genesis 9:8-15

1 Peter 3:18-22

Mark 1:12-15

Reflection

In Lent, we journey into the desert to discern our future commitment to God.

Each year on the first Sunday of Lent the Gospel reading is one of the Synoptic accounts of the temptation of Jesus in the desert by Satan. Since the story mentions Jesus spending 40 days in the desert it is most appropriate for the first Sunday of Lent.

The Greek word translated “tempted” can also mean “to be put to the test.” Like Jesus we enter the Lenten desert to have our faith put to the test and to discern who we are called to be in relationship to God.

The Gospel of Mark makes it clear that the Spirit drove Jesus into the desert. With our own hectic pace, sometimes we need to have the Spirit drive us into the desert, where we can reflect on our lives---spend more time by ourselves---to confront our temptations and to turn ourselves more attentively toward God and each other. The challenge is do we look for Jesus and the Spirit in places that are hard, lonely, and difficult in our life?

Just as Jesus was not alone in the desert for angels ministered to him, we know we are not alone. It is in the desert that we find out if we really are believers in Jesus and like him rely on God to save us and strengthen us.

In the Bible, the desert is a rich symbol filled with a variety of meanings.

Desert: A place of Journey and Discernment.

In the Old Testament, ancient Israel's four decades in the desert was not simply a time of aimless wandering, of pointless movement. The people were on a journey to enter into covenant with God. Two temptations against the journey occur and have to be dealt with. The first is the temptation to simply stop the journey to settle down and to say: "That's enough! Let's stay here."

The second temptation is to want to reverse the journey, to go back to where we came from like the Israelites who complained to Moses: "Why did you bring us out of Egypt?" (Exodus 4:11). This second temptation is nostalgia for the past. The past looks more attractive than the present, more secure, safer. As well it ought! We have already been there; it holds no surprises. In nostalgia we want to bring the present into the past in order to avoid the future. In Lent, however, we journey into the desert so as to discern our future commitments; the desert affords us an opportunity to examine how well we have aligned ourselves with God, Christ and one another.

Ask Yourself

To what or whom is God calling you this Lent?

Desert: A Place of Testing

Both ancient Israel and Jesus were tempted and tested in the desert. In the Gospels, Jesus is tempted to be a different kind of Messiah; to take the path of spectacle and power rather than that of humble service. Jesus is put to the test in this wasteland by Satan. Satan in Greek is the "Hinderer;" that is anything, anyone, any event or circumstance, any decision, culture or relationship that keeps us from fulfilling our promises and commitments, from being faithful to our covenant with God.

The only demon that really matters waits for all of us in the desert, on his own ground. That is why Jesus went into the desert, to confront the demons in his own life. Not that his enemy was not everywhere---but for the showdown. You have to stalk the beast in its lair. When the devil boasted that he owned the whole world Jesus did not argue. He gave the devil his due. And it is significant that Jesus did not overwhelm Satan the “Hinderer” with majestic splendor. He simply held his ground until the Satan went away. Neither do we have to beat the devil; we just have to survive the desert.

But if we survive the desert experience we come out different persons. The desert is not something we do; it is something we experience. It isn't something we make for ourselves; it is something that makes us. We never know what is waiting for us in the desert or what will happen to us or how we might come out. Because of this, it is very tempting to avoid the desert experience. However if we do not go into the desert to find God, God has been known to make our lives a desert so God can find us.

Ask Yourself

How is your life a desert sometimes? How has God spoken to you in times when you felt lost?

We enter the Lenten desert to confront our temptations and to turn ourselves more intentionally toward God and each other so that we can emerge on Easter as people prepared to proclaim the Gospel. The first step of our journey is to: “Repent and believe in the Gospel.”

Jesus emerges from the desert to proclaim the good news. Only by following the way of Jesus through the Gospel, hearing his word and adopting his values can a person understand more deeply the mystery of God’s reign. The beginning of this journey through the Gospel and through Lent calls for what in Greek is known as *metanoia* – a change of direction an about face, a second look at life and belief, an act of trust in God who guides the unfolding journey.

Reflection Questions

- ✚ What is the desert into which I feel called by the Spirit?
- ✚ What or whom do I expect to encounter in the desert ?
- ✚ Who or what hinders you from encountering God and Jesus?
- ✚ Who will minister to you in the desert?

Activities for the First Week of Lent

For Individuals

Decide on the foods you will fast from eating this week and then estimate what they would cost. Using that money purchase non-perishable foodstuffs to donate to a food shelf or pantry.

For Children

Lead your family members in prayer this week either before meals, or in the morning or at bed time.

For Families

Prepare together a meal of rice and beans. It is one of the easiest and simplest meals to make and it can place you in solidarity with many of the poor of the world. Pray during the preparation of the meal, thanking God for the beans and the rice. Pray while eating the meal for the hungry and poor of the world.

For Parish Groups

Organize a group of parishioners to visit the sick or shut ins of the parish. Take along some food or baked goods for groups to share.

Closing Prayer

Leader: God, send your angels to minister to us this Lent the way you sent them to minister to Jesus in the desert.

All: Michael from the East to make us strong.

Leader: Gabriel from the West to make us wise.

All: Raphael from the south to make us warm, loving and caring.

Leader: A guardian angel from the North to protect each of us.

All: Amen

Exchange a greeting of peace with all who are present.

