

On June 12, 2005, the late Steve Jobs the founder and CEO of Apple Computer and of Pixar Animation Studios delivered the commencement address to the graduating class at Stanford University. At one point in his speech Jobs stated: *“When I was 17, I read a quote that went something like: ‘If you live each day as if it were your last, someday you’ll most certainly be right.’ ...Since then, for the past 33 years, I have looked in the mirror every morning and asked myself: ‘If today were the last day of my life, would I want to do what I am about to do today?... Remembering that I’ll be dead soon is the most important tool I’ve ever encountered to help me make the big choices in life. ...No one has ever escaped it. ...Death is very likely the single best invention of Life. It’s Life’s change agent. It clears out the old to make way for the new.”*

As always, on the First Sunday in Lent we encounter Jesus in the desert. This year’s account from St. Mark is especially brief. No mention is made of the three temptations that are part of St. Matthew and St. Luke’s telling. Starkness is its message. To go into the desert is no simple, easy task. Its environment is harsh and unforgiving. It is to wrestle with life and death. It is to come face-to-face with the meaning and purpose of life. Every moment counts. A wrong calculation, giving way to distraction can mean death. It requires jettisoning everything that is superfluous and focus one’s energies on what is essential.

It’s no easy season, Lent. Jesus faces Satan in a titanic struggle between good and evil that lasts forty days. Jesus’ journey and struggle with temptation is a model for us. Lent is a time when the Spirit (God himself) drives us, like Jesus, out into a “desert” and challenges us, much like in Steve Job’s reflection, to realize that life in this world is lent to us for a time and, consequently, a time to confront important questions: For who, or for what am I living? Lent is a time to rid ourselves of those attitudes, choices and actions that are so much superfluous “baggage” in life. Lent is the time to begin, or strengthen, our resolve to live our “real” life; not the illusion we try (or have allowed the world or someone else) to craft for us, on which we spend so much time, energy and money trying to maintain, but in the face of the big picture, especially for us as people of faith, eternal life with God, and which, like it or not, will be stripped away from us at death. At our life’s end, what will we have to show for how we spent our time, energy

(physical, psychological, spiritual) and money? What will fill our hands as we stand before God?

In today's first reading of the familiar story of the "Great Flood" we witness God's renewing spirit washing over the earth in a great act of cleansing. To the righteous Noah and those who escaped in the ark as well as a renewed creation, God enters into a covenant relationship through the natural symbol of the rainbow. Never again, God says, will he destroy all life, rather the rainbow is his sign of the divine desire to partner with creation and we human beings in bringing the world to the fullness of life he intended in its original calling forth. In the second reading St. Peter uses this story as a "type" of our own cleansing death through the waters of baptism through which we entered into the heart of God through Jesus' death and resurrection, the "new and eternal covenant" and rose from them a new creation, made in his image and likeness, members of his body, brothers and sisters to each other. Through our baptism we the already baptized already share in this new life, even as we accompany those among us in these last six weeks of their journey to its renewing waters where they will "die and rise with Christ" and become, with us, members of his body. Like these empty vessels before the altar, Lent is a time for all of us the baptized to allow God to "empty" us and prepare us again to be filled with renewed life in the Spirit at Easter.

While Steve Jobs was a follower of the Buddhist spiritual tradition, this additional quotation from his June 2005 speech could, (with a bit of alteration) I believe be put on the lips of Jesus today to each of us as we enter the desert of self-emptying Lent. *"Don't be trapped living with the results of other people's thinking. Don't let the noise of others' opinions drown out your own inner voice (the voice of the Holy Spirit). ...Everything else is secondary."*