

LENT SUNDAY I "B"
FEBRUARY 17/18, 2018

Today's Gospel has just stated: "The Spirit drove Jesus into the desert, and he remained there for forty days, tempted by Satan. He was among the wild beasts, and the angels ministered to him" (Mk. 1:12-13). The Gospel follows the scene of Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist in the Jordan River with his experience of seeing the Holy Spirit descend upon him and the voice of the Father revealing him as his "beloved Son with whom I am well pleased." Jesus' baptism was the experience, in his human nature, of God's election and revelation of the covenant relationship of Father to Son.

In today's second reading the author of the first letter of Peter recalls the story of Noah and the flood and God's covenant relationship with Noah following it through the external sign of the rainbow as foreshadowing his readers' (and our) experience of baptism. Through baptism, like Noah and Jesus, they (and we) passed through the waters of death. Like Noah their (and our) former sinful lives were buried. Like Noah passing over the waters and Jesus rising from the waters they (and we), experienced election by God and entered into covenant relationship with Him. Unlike Noah their (and our) covenant was not symbolized by an external sign (a rainbow), but like that of Jesus, the gift of God's Holy Spirit poured into their (and our) hearts.

Following his baptism, Jesus journeys into the desert to wrestle with, and sort out, the implications of his election by God and prepare himself for his mission which will flow from it. Elected by God, Lent is our joining with Jesus in the desert of our heart, to sort out, and wrestle with the "wild beasts" within us, and like him, emerge at Easter with a new or renewed resolve for the work of proclaiming the Kingdom of God as we see him do at the end of today's Gospel as his church and individually as his disciples.

The "beasts" that inhabit a desert—lions, poisonous serpents, scorpions—all pose a threat to life. Our beasts may not be physical, but they are just as deadly—consciences dulled by the incessant stream of cultural values emanating from the multitude of media and other outlets which run counter to the values and lifestyle set before us in the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes, the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy and in other places in the Scriptures--

temptation to greed, unfettered materialism, disregard for the dignity and sacredness of human life at every stage of development and flourishing, rampant self-interest, addictions of various kinds—pornography, sexism, alcohol other chemical substances, and just recently I learned of programs for technology addiction, and the list goes on. These “beasts” pose potential lethal threats to our spiritual life.

How this Lent might we allow Jesus to confront and ultimately defeat the “wild beasts” within us and renew us in the life of God’s covenant through the Holy Spirit given us in our baptism and sealed in our confirmation? In today’s Gospel story in the accounts of St. Matthew and St. Luke Jesus’ struggle is recorded as three specific temptations. Both St. Matthew and St. Luke record that Jesus met his temptations head on and overcame them by recourse to Holy Scripture. In the Word of God Jesus found strength and comfort.

Last fall and again this spring through our parish’s partnering with Evangelical Catholic we have been given a powerful and effective tool to help us in our temptations and the offer of comfort—the 1% challenge—14 minutes and 24 seconds everyday given to reading, reflecting, and praying with Jesus’ words in the Gospel. These prayer cards in the pews are available to assist you. They provide instruction as well as giving 30 days of Gospel readings to initially guide you. Or you may want to use the Gospel readings for each day of Lent printed in the Bulletin.

As we journey with Jesus in our desert, sort out our priorities, wrestle with our “beasts” seek comfort in God’s will and plan for our lives, may all of us discover these next six weeks and then beyond with Jesus the ways God which are love and truth to those who keep his covenant.”

18 February, 2018
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