

Lent 1

“He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan, and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.”

St. Mark, in this week’s Gospel reading, recalls the familiar story of Jesus’ baptism, the moving into the desert and the temptation associated with that desert experience and then the return of Jesus to begin his ministry. There is the sense that in his recitation St. Mark informs us that there are three actions associated with any person who wishes to commit themselves to Jesus. The first part, which we refer to as Baptism, is the initial commitment to our Lord. The second part, a desert experience if you will, is to discern what role Jesus is calling us to play at any given moment and then the third is to carry that discernment into our daily living. As we enter into this Lenten season it seems to be an appropriate time during these forty some days to journey through these threefold actions as presented by St. Mark.

The first action is that of Baptism. We are outwardly baptized just one time and that one time is sufficient. There are, however, numerous baptismal experiences in the sense of wishing to deepen or re-establish our relationship to God. God is never apart from us, but we may feel estranged at times and that desire to return to the sense of the presence of the Holy in our life is an opportunity to enter into the baptismal experience. Numerous issues may be the initiating force of that desire; a friend’s problems, our own uncertainties, the death of a loved one, any one of which might call us back to desiring a deeper and more meaningful relationship with our Creator which entails a recommitment to God.

I believe our desire to enter into this new relationship leads us into the process of discernment which in a sense is the desert experience. St. Mark tells us that when Jesus went into the desert he was tempted by Satan and was with wild beasts but was also waited upon by angels. The fact that we want to recommit ourselves to God is no guarantee that we will do so. The exuberance of a baptismal experience is followed by the reality of our daily lives which may hinder us from being the person we feel called to be. The struggle within ourselves is the

desert experience and while we may be confronted with our own beasts, with ideas like, we really do not need to change who we are, or, that thought of changing my relationship with God was really some strange notion. We are also, in such moments in the presence of God who will sustain us during our desert experience as we struggle to understand who we are at this time, and how God might change and use us.. The Lenten season provides a great time to do some disciplined discerning. We might pick up the bible occasionally and attempt to read and inwardly digest it in a new way. We may look to find a devotional writer or theologian whose writings challenge, comfort and sustain us at the same time. We may make the decision to meditate in a disciplined manner or be willing to evaluate more regularly the way we relate to those around us in hopes of improving our relationships. The purpose of the desert experience is to grow in terms of who we are and grow toward God.

Ideally, after our Baptismal and desert experiences, we are ready to re-engage not only God but the life God has given to us, including the people around us and the issues that might confront us. Jesus would have numerous desert experiences during his life and ministry where he went off to find himself and redefine God's call upon his life. He would then come back renewed, ready to engage the life God presented to him.

God calls each of us to a similar journey of faith and trust. God does so for our own personal well-being certainly, but also that we might become God's ambassadors. We invite others into this journey of faith that they might become renewed with the challenge to allow God into their lives in new and exciting ways; to experience a Baptismal moment of their own, to go into their own desert and return with fresh lives and fresh visions that strengthen and sustain their lives as we have been strengthened and sustained in our lives.

Amen