

Connecting with the Sunday Readings

First Sunday in Lent

Gospel Word

Mark 1:12–15

Lent is a very sacred time of the Church year. It is a time to focus on how we are doing in our Christian life. Some of us set aside a time for extra personal prayer. Some of us fast from certain foods or activities, and abstain from meat on Friday. Some of us will give to the poor and needy. Those are the three traditional activities of Lent: prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

We begin Lent listening to the Gospel according to Mark's account of Jesus in the wilderness or desert. The words *desert* or *wilderness* are symbolic for a place of solitude, apart from the distractions of ordinary life. There, Jesus is tempted by Satan. He shares his space with wild beasts, and with angels who wait on him. Unlike the accounts of Jesus' temptation in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, this account is very short and general. It does not detail what happened. But even in its starkness we hear that Jesus is confronted by the presence and the power of evil.

This is a preview of coming attractions. Jesus is bringing Good News to a world that is not always so good. There are forces that will oppose him. Eventually they will kill him. But that's not the final word. At the end of Lent we celebrate the great victory of good over evil, love over hate, and life over death. Each year, at the time of Lent and in the celebration of the Paschal Mystery, the death and Resurrection of Jesus, we are reminded that life is like a battle, a contest and standoff between good and evil. In the end, good will win, but right now we still have to face the battle.

—by David Thomas, PhD, Co-Director, The Bethany Family Institute

Living the Word

After his 40 days in solitude, Jesus emerges with an invitation to all: The Kingdom of God is now, repent and believe in the Gospel. Notice that this is a call of challenge. What's been hoped for — a better life with God — is now being proclaimed! It might be helpful to compare the proclamation to the unveiling of a new product that becomes available at midnight: People line up early. They want to be first. They want to be sure they will be able to get "it." Here, Jesus offers much more, but we must orient ourselves to receiving it (repent) and then graciously take the gift of God into our lives (believe).

The gift of God — is God! We are called into a deep relationship with the God who created us, who sustains our every step and who desires our love. In that sense, Jesus is like a traveling salesperson. So are disciples. Those called to discipleship have the same job description. We learn from Jesus, take it in, and pass it on to others. That's how it works. Jesus came charging out of the desert with this basic agenda. How we each do this depends on our circumstances.

Lent is taking "time out" from our ordinary routine to review where we are with our basic agenda. It is an important time to center on what's most important in our lives as followers of Jesus. Some people go on retreats to do this. They recognize the value of getting away so they can focus on what's most important.

Most of us cannot afford to take 40 days away from the business of life. But we can take mini-retreats. Maybe take a daily 10-30-minute spiritual break to pray, read the Scriptures, or read other inspiring books or pamphlets. Each of us has to decide what's best, but we really do need those moments when we can escape the phone, the computer, and the TV, in order to find that special silence which allows us to see more clearly what's most important in our lives as repentant and believing Christians.

One-line Prayer

God, Our Father,
You who are ever present, we seek you in
the noise of our daily life and in the quiet
moments when we are alone with you.
Amen.