

FATHER MARK SCHULTE HOMILY
First Sunday of Lent (B)
February 21, 2021
“Desert Journey”

Last Wednesday was Ash Wednesday, which marks the beginning of the Lenten Season. At that time, we talked about how the ashes that we received are an important sacramental, a visible sign that the person who wears the ashes intends to repent of their sins and grow deeper in their love of God and neighbor. We said that asking God’s forgiveness of our sins and advancing in charity is something we strive for at all times, but Lent is a special time in which we do this as a preparation for the celebration of our Lord’s resurrection on Easter Sunday.

And so, this 40-day period of time from Ash Wednesday until the Easter Triduum is the Lenten period. These 40 days remind us that our Lord Jesus Christ spent 40 days in the desert, fasting and praying, and being tempted by the devil, as he prepared for his mission of salvation.

The Church Calendar is divided into 3 distinct years; A, B, and C. In each of these years a different account of Jesus’ 40-day experience in the desert is given from the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

This year’s account is taken from the Gospel of Mark. The Gospels of Matthew and Luke give us greater detail regarding Jesus’ encounter with the devil; how he was tempted in different ways; the dialogue between He and the devil. None of this is given in the account that we just heard from the Gospel of Mark.

Mark only tells that Jesus was sent by the Spirit into the desert for 40 days to be tempted by Satan; He was with wild beasts; and angels waited on Him. There are no details at all about the different temptations. Nothing at all about what transpired between Jesus and Satan.

But sometimes we can learn as much about what is not said as we can about what is said. There is a kind of correlation between what took place in the desert and what happened in the Garden of Eden.

In the Garden, Adam was overpowered by the deceptive temptations of the devil. Satan wanted Adam to disobey God, and Adam did. As a result, sin and its effect, death, came into the world.

In the desert Jesus who is the new Adam, will be victorious over the devil’s many temptations, causing the devil to flee in defeat.

As his followers, we as believers are called to imitate Jesus in the desert and this is where we can learn something from Mark's relatively brief desert account.

The 40-day desert experience represents our human journey through life and this world. We will be tempted by Satan just like Jesus. We will be among the wild beast – which can be a metaphor for the different dangers that we will encounter. We imitate Jesus in his faithfulness to the Father, but we are not Jesus, we are not God. Where Jesus entered into a dialogue with the devil, we must never converse with the devil in any way (re: Tarot cards, Ouija boards, séances, channeling, fortune telling, etc.). Adam and Eve entered into a dialogue with the devil. This is what Satan wants. He is many times more intelligent than we are. If we try to dialogue and negotiate with him, he will win every time. If we experience the temptation of the devil we do not play around with temptation, we flee from temptation. The non-dialogue in Mark's account is a message to us that we should not dialogue with the devil.

We can be victorious over the devil's temptations through the grace and power of Jesus, not by our own power and strength and wit. We imitate Jesus in the desert by our obedience to the Father, just like He was obedient.

We are weak human beings, but we can and should grow stronger spiritually by our fasting, prayer, and acts of charity. Lent is a special time in which we strive to grow stronger spiritually. Lent is a time of intense spiritual battle and we must commit ourselves to engaging in this spiritual battle. We will only be victorious over the devil if we are spiritually committed.

Let us ask the Holy Spirit, the Spirit that sent Jesus out into the desert, to help us be spiritually fruitful this season of Lent.

Ref. Catechism of the Catholic Church, par. 2110-2117.