

1st Sunday of Lent – Year B

With Ash Wednesday last week we have begun our season of Lent for 2024. Lent will last for 40 days until Holy Thursday in imitation of Jesus's 40 days in the wilderness. *However, did you know that the Sundays of Lent are not counted in the 40 days since every Sunday is a celebration of Christ's Resurrection and not a day of fasting or penance?* Therefore one could legitimately take a break from fasting each Sunday during Lent. However, practically it might be much easier to continue our fasting in whatever we have given up, for the whole of Lent rather than breaking our fast every Sunday.

Each Lent all the baptized are expected to adopt the three Lenten disciplines of Prayer, Fasting, and Almsgiving to those in need; as a time of spiritual renewal and repentance as we prepare for the coming feasts of Easter. **This time is also meant to be dedicated to our spiritual battle, in a particular way.** We are aware of the constant psychosocial and spiritual battle that goes on within us and the battle for good and evil that taking place in our world. Jesus himself had to go through this experience of spiritual battle, with the enemy of our souls, namely Satan.

The Word Satan in Hebrew simply means an adversary, and in the Old Testament, it was first used for human opponents. The original meaning of the word was anyone who was a dangerous opponent. Later it came to mean one who pleads a case against another, an accuser of people before God, the public prosecutor of heaven. Finally, it came to mean God's adversary, a demonic Spirit opposed to God and all that is of God. By the time of the New Testament, Satan was understood to be the principal Spirit of evil who was involved in a mighty struggle against God, a struggle that would only end in the last days of history.

In our gospel today we hear, *“The Spirit drove Jesus out into the wilderness and he remained there forty days, and was tempted by Satan. He was with the wild beasts, and the angels ministered to him.”*

Question - Which Spirit drove Jesus to the wilderness? - Into the desert? - Into the Silence? -*The Holy Spirit.* Just before he was driven into the wilderness, Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist in the river Jordan and the Holy Spirit came on him like a dove and he heard

the voice from heaven “*You are my Son, whom I love, with you I am well pleased*” Straight after this Trinitarian experience Jesus the beloved Son is driven to the wilderness by the Holy Spirit, to be tempted by Satan. Interesting isn’t it? Why would the Holy Spirit drive Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan? Shouldn’t the Holy Spirit drive and lead Jesus away from Satan? After a great spiritual encounter at the river Jordan, after hearing his Father’s voice of love and affirmation of him, he is driven into the wilderness to be with the Wild Beasts and Satan.

This is the Christian experience for many of us. At one moment, we feel we are with God, we know the Father’s love for us, we feel close to God, we enjoy the practice of our faith, celebrating the Eucharist, doing our ministry, and we might even feel like we are growing in our faith and coming closer to God...

But the very next minute, the tables turn. All of a sudden we are faced with “Wild Beasts” whatever they are in our lives, we feel like we are in a battle with Satan and even could feel like God is not there anymore, but we are left hanging in the wilderness, lonely, afraid. These are the times we can truly be tempted to listen to the voice of the devil. To listen to the voice of the world, to listen to the voice of the enemy of our souls. Nevertheless, in this place of testing and trial, divine help is also present. We hear how the angels ministered to Jesus in his time of testing and struggle in the wilderness. ***The Holy Spirit leads each of us into the wilderness, into the desert to test our faith, to purify our love, to deepen our hope, and to strip away our idols.***

“How do you experience “the wilderness” in your life? What are the ‘wild beasts’ for you in this place? Who ministers to you or looks after you?

In the Bible, the wilderness is both the place where the people of God meet God and encounter his power, and also the place where we are tempted to worship idols instead of God. Talking about idols, we had 288 000 Swiftie fans at the MCG over the weekend at Taylor Swift’s Concert – listening to catchy pop tunes and questionable lyrics. Let us pray that they will discover life-giving Words of the Gospel as they mature.

The season of Lent invites us to examine whether we are responding to the Spirit of God in our lives or succumbing to the allurements of false idols.

The image of the desert evokes thoughts of confronting life in all its rawness. The starkness of the landscape of the Judean wilderness is almost overwhelming. In the desert, life can be stripped back to its most basic requirements so it is easier to identify what is important in our lives. Lent symbolically invites us into the desert, to reflect on what is important and to live more simply in closer union with God. So the three spiritual disciplines of Fasting, Praying, and Almsgiving help us to get in touch with our true needs of life and come closer to God.

So we have entered the Lenten Fast of 40 days. Noah and his family were on the Ark for 40 days preparing for a new start for the human race after its destruction from the flood. Moses remained at Mount Sinai in prayer and fasting for 40 days in preparation to receive the 10 commandments and the covenant with Israel. Prophet Elijah after destroying the false gods in Israel fled into the wilderness and journeyed 40 days to the mountain of God at Sinai, where God commissioned him to restore the worship of one true God in the land. Following that great line of tradition we hear how Jesus himself spent the 40 days in the wilderness being tested and being prepared for his ministry ahead. So we are in a time of preparation, testing, repentance, and purification. So let us enter deeply into the grace of this season and walk with the Spirit of God during and renew our faith, hope, and love in God. Let's turn away from all that is harmful to our lives and souls. Let's walk in the footsteps of Jesus.