

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert for forty days.” Words from our Gospel today from the 4th chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke – sisters and brothers, may the Lord give to you his peace and his joy.

In the first reading from the book of Deuteronomy, Moses gives an account of Israel’s journey, beginning with their ancestors’ arrival in Egypt, continuing with their nation’s development and ensuing enslavement in Egypt, and their journey of freedom through the desert to the Promised Land. It was a long and difficult journey. And truth be told, in the crucible of the desert, the nation of Israel did not fare very well. They complained constantly. Believe it or not, in comparison they yearned for their days of slavery under their taskmasters in Egypt. They turned away from their relationship with God and began worshipping a golden calf instead. When they should have went left, they went right. Everything went from bad to worse. And yet Moses and the nation of Israel speaks fondly of this desert journey because despite all these hardships, God continued to embrace his people. When they were hungry, God gave them manna for food and water for drink. He cured them when they were bitten by snakes. Though they were lost and wandered far and wide, God ensured they made it to the Promised Land through the guidance and teachings of Moses. God alone helped them through their desert experience. It was a defining moment in the nation’s history, where they realized that they could make it through anything with God’s grace.

The same is true of Jesus’ trials in the desert. He fought off the temptations each time referencing the Word of God, referencing Scripture: “You shall live by every word that comes forth from God’s mouth. You shall worship the Lord your God, him alone shall you serve. Do not put the Lord your God to the test.” Jesus was not deceived by the voices coming out of the desert. He knew his satisfaction alone would be found in God. Jesus knew that there is no power apart from God. Jesus knew that God would protect him and therefore would not need to go looking for trouble. Jesus was led into the desert by the spirit, so that he might come to know that he would prevail in his mission and ministry against all the forces of evil.

Certainly, there are moments in life when we feel oppressed by the world around us, like the Hebrews who were enslaved by the Egyptians. Just like the Israelites who wandered around the desert for 40 years, there are moments when we think, ‘are we ever going to get there?’ caught up as we are in the seemingly barren wastelands of our lives. And then there are moments when we face great temptations and struggles as Jesus did in the solitude of the desert. Sooner or later, every person’s journey of life takes him or her through the desert.

Think of your desert moments. Perhaps, these are struggles with a particular sin. Perhaps, these are moments when you are having trouble getting along with your spouse or your children or your parents and you are stressed out. Perhaps it’s a medical condition that you or a loved one is going through. Perhaps, you are grieving over the loss of a close family member or friend. Perhaps, it is a struggle with a particular task or responsibility at work or a colleague there who makes life difficult. Perhaps it’s something with the house or with finances. Maybe it’s the situation of the community, the culture, or our world. Whatever it is, our lives are filled with deserts. Making our way through these deserts are often not the most pleasant experiences; indeed, such deserts may make for some of the most challenging chapters of our life.

But it’s important that we do not skip over these chapters or ignore them because *every* moment of life is meaningful. Indeed, desert moments and our response to them quite often are defining moments along our journeys, and they will in turn influence the trajectory of our lives for better or for worse. The readings reveal how all those who call upon God in faith will find salvation, discovering God to be their protection and strength. Knowing that we can make it through moments like these with God’s grace, should give us the strength to face anything. May we come to discover in times such as these, that ‘everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved!’

Readings: <http://usccb.org/bible/readings/031019.cfm>

First Sunday of Lent

Lectionary: 24

Reading 1 DT 26:4-10

Moses spoke to the people, saying:

"The priest shall receive the basket from you
and shall set it in front of the altar of the LORD, your God.
Then you shall declare before the Lord, your God,
'My father was a wandering Aramean
who went down to Egypt with a small household
and lived there as an alien.
But there he became a nation
great, strong, and numerous.
When the Egyptians maltreated and oppressed us,
imposing hard labor upon us,
we cried to the LORD, the God of our fathers,
and he heard our cry
and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression.
He brought us out of Egypt
with his strong hand and outstretched arm,
with terrifying power, with signs and wonders;
and bringing us into this country,
he gave us this land flowing with milk and honey.
Therefore, I have now brought you the firstfruits
of the products of the soil
which you, O LORD, have given me.'
And having set them before the Lord, your God,
you shall bow down in his presence."

Responsorial Psalm PS 91:1-2, 10-11, 12-13, 14-15.

R. (cf. 15b) **Be with me, Lord, when I am in trouble.**

You who dwell in the shelter of the Most High,
who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,
say to the LORD, "My refuge and fortress,
my God in whom I trust."

R. **Be with me, Lord, when I am in trouble.**

No evil shall befall you,
nor shall affliction come near your tent,
For to his angels he has given command about you,
that they guard you in all your ways.

R. **Be with me, Lord, when I am in trouble.**

Upon their hands they shall bear you up,
lest you dash your foot against a stone.
You shall tread upon the asp and the viper;
you shall trample down the lion and the dragon.

R. **Be with me, Lord, when I am in trouble.**

Because he clings to me, I will deliver him;
I will set him on high because he acknowledges my name.
He shall call upon me, and I will answer him;

I will be with him in distress;
I will deliver him and glorify him.
R. **Be with me, Lord, when I am in trouble.**

Reading 2[**ROM 10:8-13**](#)

Brothers and sisters:
What does Scripture say?
*The word is near you,
in your mouth and in your heart*
—that is, the word of faith that we preach—,
for, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord
and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead,
you will be saved.
For one believes with the heart and so is justified,
and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved.
For the Scripture says,
No one who believes in him will be put to shame.
For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek;
the same Lord is Lord of all,
enriching all who call upon him.
For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Verse Before The Gospel[**MT 4:4B**](#)

One does not live on bread alone,
but on every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.

Gospel[**LK 4:1-13**](#)

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan
and was led by the Spirit into the desert for forty days,
to be tempted by the devil.
He ate nothing during those days,
and when they were over he was hungry.
The devil said to him,
"If you are the Son of God,
command this stone to become bread."
Jesus answered him,
"It is written, *One does not live on bread alone.*"
Then he took him up and showed him
all the kingdoms of the world in a single instant.
The devil said to him,
"I shall give to you all this power and glory;
for it has been handed over to me,
and I may give it to whomever I wish.
All this will be yours, if you worship me."
Jesus said to him in reply,
"It is written:
*You shall worship the Lord, your God,
and him alone shall you serve.*"
Then he led him to Jerusalem,
made him stand on the parapet of the temple, and said to him,

"If you are the Son of God,
throw yourself down from here, for it is written:
He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,
and:
*With their hands they will support you,
lest you dash your foot against a stone."*
Jesus said to him in reply,
"It also says,
You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test."
When the devil had finished every temptation,
he departed from him for a time.

Desert Moments on the Journey

First Sunday of Lent: March 10, 2019

I. Opening Prayer: "Journey to Easter Prayer"

Lord Jesus, you are the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

As we gather to reflect on your journey to the cross and anticipate the glory of your resurrection, we ask that you send your Spirit to guide our hearts and minds on our Journey to Easter.

We know that it is you who are always journeying forward with us in both the desert moments and mountaintop experiences of our lives, that you show us the way, and that it is by your Cross and Resurrection that we are set free from our sins and are reconciled to Our Father.

May our journey with you this Lenten Season be a transformative experience that will help us to grow into an ever closer and deeper relationship with you, because it is through you that we are brought home.

We ask this in your Most Holy Name. Amen.

II. Creating the Space

Since this is the first time that groups will be meeting together, it will begin with a period of introductions so as to begin fostering an open, comfortable space in which members can share their faith and support each other in their respective journeys. There are many ways that this may be done. A practical suggestion may be to have group members pair up and discuss who they are and then in turn introduce each other to the group at large. Their discussion may include items such as: their name, favorite hobby, association with the parish, what brought them here, and something they are doing for Lent or hoping to get out of Lent. Remind group members that this is a safe space where they will be accepted and their confidentiality respected.

III. Theme and Weekend Scripture Readings

The theme for this week is "Desert Moments on the Journey." Sooner or later, every person's journey of life takes him or her through the desert. There are moments in life when we feel burdened by the world around us, like the Hebrews who were oppressed by the Egyptians. There are moments when we face great temptations and struggles as Jesus did in the desert. Just like the Israelites who wandered around the desert for 40 years, there are moments when we think, 'are we ever going to get there?' caught up as we are in the seemingly barren wastelands of our lives. Moments like these are often not the most pleasant experiences; indeed, such deserts may make for some of the most challenging chapters of our life. Yet one thing is for sure: desert moments and our response to them have a way of defining our journeys. May we come to discover in times such as these, that 'everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved!' (Romans 10:13, Psalm 91:14). The Sunday readings for this week are taken from Deuteronomy 26:4-10, Psalm 91, Romans 10:8-13, and Luke 4:1-13. Have the Gospel read aloud and then allow time for some silent reflection before beginning Faith Sharing.

IV. Discussion Questions for Faith Sharing

- Is there a word, phrase, or image from the Gospel reading that stuck out to you? Why do you think that is the case? What do you think God is saying to you?
- In the first reading from the book of Deuteronomy, Moses gives an account of Israel's journey, beginning with their ancestors' arrival in Egypt, continuing with their nation's development and ensuing enslavement in Egypt, and their journey of freedom through the desert to the Promised Land. How would you describe your life's journey to this point?
- The readings reveal how those who call upon God in faith will find salvation, discovering God to be their protection and strength. Do you find it easy to trust in God's saving presence as a stronghold in your life? How would you describe your relationship with God overall? Where has God been throughout your life's journey? Have you been aware of God's presence or not?
- We all have desert moments in our journey of life. What are some of the desert moments of your life's journey? How did they come about? How did you face them? What helped you to get through?
- As we reflect upon the temptations that Jesus faced in the Gospel this weekend, is there a particular temptation jumps out to you. Are there any temptations that are harder for you to resist? What can we learn from Jesus in facing our temptations?
- How do you imagine this desert journey of Lent will help you to arrive at the joys of Easter? What concretely do you need in your life's journey for this to happen? How can the Church support you in this?

V. Reminders

Remind the group about the next meeting along with any other considerations for time and space

VI. Closing Prayer

Conclude in prayer, providing the opportunity for individual members to offer prayers of thanksgiving, petition, and adoration in the group setting as they feel comfortable. It may be good to gather these prayers and praises into one using a common, well-known prayer such as the Our Father, Hail Mary, and/or Glory Be.