

## SERMON ON MARK 1:9-15.

May the words of my mouth and meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, my Lord, and my Redeemer.

We are in the Lenten period that is significant in our Christian tradition as a season for prayer, meditation, fasting and self-denial. We need to ask ourselves whether we have embodied these important aspects of church tradition during this Lenten period, as we experience the love of Christ in our lives.

The word LENT, at least in English, comes from the old English lengthen, which may have been influenced by the Dutch name LENTE or Lenten. These words all mean springtime or spring season. They also are related to English words lengthen or make longer. So I think it's appropriate to think of Lent not just as a season of 40 days but also as it has been called by others the springtime of our souls. What a beautiful image for us to meditate on these first days of our Lenten journey. It's a penitential season. It seems we should feel properly penitential. But if we think of lent as springtime for our souls, we tap into what the eucharistic prayers of the mass remind us is a joyful season in which we prepare to have our minds and hearts renewed.

In today's reading, God speaks to us through the evangelist Mark and reminds us of how to come to this newness of Spirit by looking to Jesus' example.

Mark does not speculate on what Jesus was thinking about, does not psychologize Jesus pondering the meaning of his baptismal experience. In this scene, Jesus is not being tempted but tested. Jesus has just been declared Son of God and filled with the power of God, the Holy Spirit. The world lies in the power of Satan, the evil one who has previously prevailed against all comers. The promised eschatological savior appears, filled with the power of God. The Spirit casts Jesus out into the wilderness.

There is good news to be found in Mark's mention in this passage of the presence of angels who minister to Jesus. We have hope because the same Spirit that accompanied Jesus and provided for his care during this time of testing has now come to dwell with us. When we find ourselves in those places where we see nothing but empty, terrifying space around us, we too can trust that we are not there alone. No desolation is so complete that God is not there with us. The Spirit

accompanies us into unfamiliar territories as well as the settled places in our lives. Like Jesus, we can feel re-invigorated during the most trying times in our lives.

The temptation of Jesus came after he had fulfilled the ritual purification of Baptism. Remember that John baptized Jesus Christ to fulfill the law of righteousness. John himself claimed that he was not worthy to baptize Christ because of the divine nature of Christ. After the Baptism of Christ, he was filled with the Holy Spirit, which in essence was the appropriate time for Christ. Christ needed the Holy Spirit's guidance to overcome the challenges and temptation of Satan in the wilderness.

Jesus was directed in the wilderness not just to accomplish the guidance of the Holy Spirit, but Christ was led in the wilderness to pray. The battle ahead for Christ was enormous, and therefore, he needed divine inspiration. Amazingly, we could not anticipate the person of Christ to be directed in the wilderness by Holy Spirit. Perhaps, the modern wilderness for Christ could be "Capitol Hill" according to current human standards. Christ needed to go to the wilderness to prove that he did not come to enjoy his comfort zone but to suffer for the sake of humanity.

Jesus confronted the devil and yielded to suffering to show humanity that we must prepare for a spiritual battle. Our struggles are not against blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. We can face this spiritual warfare only if the Holy Spirit inspires us as Jesus Christ was inspired.

Our suffering today could be a form of wilderness for us, but Christ showed us how we could endure suffering for a while. He needed to be in the wilderness for 40 days to pray and seek the will of God concerning his situation. Let us ask ourselves, does the Holy Spirit always inspire us to pray at a time when we need God most in our lives?

Someone once said that a prayerless person is like a ball without air. Such a ball has outlived its usefulness. Therefore, in our crisis moment, let us not be like lackluster Christians who the Holy Spirit cannot inspire to pray. Christ never yielded to the temptation of the devil. He recognized the power of the Holy Spirit working in him to defeat the whiles of the enemy. Maybe in this COVID Pandemic, God wants us to turn back to him as we spare this Lenten period for prayer, fasting, self-denial, and self-introspection. In this strange period that has altered our routine,

Christ desires our commitment to Him through prayer. Our devotion to doing God's will drives him to intervene in our situation in a way beyond our imagination. The power of God at work within us can accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine (Ephesians 3:20b).

After the Baptism of Christ, he saw the heavens are torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the beloved; with you, I am well pleased." This was an assurance of divine favor upon Christ. Remember that Christ was with the wild beast in the wilderness but could not be dismayed because GOD was with him. The Holy Spirit assures us of the angel's protection in our lives as believers in Christ. Therefore, we should not be dismayed by those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell (Mathew 10:28).

On the other hand, the Psalmist could be led in the truth of God's word by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit guides the humble in doing right and teaches the way of the Lord to the lowly. Similarly, we can keep the covenant of the Lord through the power of the Holy Spirit working in us.

The Holy Spirit inspired Jesus to proclaim God's good news with the authority and seriousness that it deserved. Likewise, the Holy Spirit inspires us to witness for Christ. How can we be our brother's keeper if we don't reach out to them with the good news of Jesus Christ? Christ has bestowed upon us the mandate to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ for repentance and forgiveness of sin. In Christ, we find perfect freedom.

In the name of God the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.