

Encountering the Spirit

Week 1: Wilderness

Opening prayer

Grant, almighty God, through the yearly observance of holy Lent, that we may grow in understanding of the riches hidden in Christ and by worthy conduct pursue their effects. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. *R.* Amen.

(Collect for the First Sunday in Lent)



Scripture

Luke 4:1-13 The Temptations in the Desert

Jesus was led by the Spirit through the wilderness and was tempted there.

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit through the wilderness, being tempted there by the devil for forty days. During that time he ate nothing and at the end he was hungry. Then the devil said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to turn into a loaf.' But Jesus replied, 'Scripture says: Man does not live on bread alone.'

Then leading him to a height, the devil showed him in a moment of time all the kingdoms of the world and said to him, 'I will give you all this power and the glory of these kingdoms, for it has been

committed to me and I give it to anyone I choose. Worship me, then, and it shall all be yours.' But Jesus answered him, 'Scripture says:

You must worship the Lord your God, and serve him alone.'

Then he led him to Jerusalem and made him stand on the parapet of the Temple. 'If you are the Son of God,' he said to him 'throw yourself down from here, for scripture says:

He will put his angels in charge of you to guard you, and again: They will hold you up on their hands in case you hurt your foot against a stone.' But Jesus answered him, 'It has been said: You must not put the Lord your God to the test.'

Having exhausted all these ways of tempting him, the devil left him, to return at the appointed time.

Let us learn to invoke the Holy Spirit often....the key word is this: come. Come. But you need to say it yourself in your own words. Come, because I find myself in difficulty. Come, because I am in the dark. Come, because I don't know what to do. Come, because I am about to fall. Come. Come. This is ... how to call upon the Spirit.

*Pope Francis Angelus,
10th November 2021*

Synodal Pathway

"Synodality" is the process of 'journeying together', a way of being the Church as envisaged by the Second Vatican Council (cf *Lumen Gentium* 12), journeying forwards in mission, together in communion where everybody has a part to play.

"The purpose of this Synod... is intended to inspire people to dream about the Church we are called to be, to make people's hopes flourish, to stimulate trust, to bind up wounds, to weave new and deeper relationships, to learn from one another, to build bridges, to enlighten minds, warm hearts, and restore strength to our hands for our common mission." (PD, 32)



Reflection

Walking together is one of the themes of the synodal pathway and a reminder that, whilst faith is personal, it is experienced and lived-out in a corporate setting. As we step out into Lent, I would like to suggest that the phrase 'we walk together', is a reminder that the most significant journeys are those of encounter. In the Gospels we often see Jesus on a journey, open to an encounter with the people he meets along the way, present to them and ready to answer their questions.

The gospel account of the 'Temptations in the Desert' presents a different dynamic to the idea of a journey, coming immediately after the Baptism of the Lord and before Our Lord's public ministry. The opening words help us on our journey: 'Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit through the wilderness'. We all have our wilderness moments where we encounter God, who speaks to us in the solitude and where, without fear because the Spirit is with us, we have to fight like Jesus against the deceptive voice of the tempter. That lying voice of the Tempter tries to draw us away from the path by working on our weaknesses, posing a false alternative to God. Do not be deceived. Notice instead that Jesus provides the model, responding only with the Word of God and does not dialogue with the Tempter.

In our journey we need to draw strength from the Spirit to act like Jesus and fight against the Tempter. Reflecting on Jesus' temptations in the desert, Pope Francis said, 'Keep it in your head and in your heart: You never talk with the devil; no dialogue is possible. Only the word of God' (Angelus, February 2021). This is worth keeping in mind as we address our own specific temptations.

As we set off, one eye is on the end-point, the Resurrection, and the other on noticing what happens on the way, and whom we encounter, which will shape our

onward passage. There are things that the Spirit will want us to notice individually and as the People of God. The life of the pilgrim is never static: it is a dynamic experience taking us along unexpected and new paths from which we grow and change. After the experience of the pandemic, it might feel as if we have been wandering like the ancient Israelites through the twists and turns of the never-ending Exodus journey. Notice, though, that despite the gifts received they often responded with negative words. Instead, ask the Spirit to guide you to the Word of God that helps you to be grateful and remain on the path. Are there things we now need to leave behind in the wilderness, temptations, or things that are no longer necessary on the journey?

It is important to understand that Lent is not primarily a time for self-denial, it is a time of intensification of the whole Christian life, leading to a climax: The Resurrection. Our forms of self-denial can help us to be aware that this is time for spiritual renewal and change. 'The season of Lent is an annual pilgrimage, an annual retreat, an annual time for stock-taking and soul-searching about the meaning of the Christian life – the dying and rising of Jesus and our dying to sin and rising to real life in him'. (Kevin W Irwin A Guide to the Eucharist & Hours: Easter).

We are both fasting and feeding at the same time. Prayer, fasting and almsgiving all help us to penetrate more deeply into the mysteries of our faith. It is drawing on scripture that gives the nourishment we need. These forty days enable us, as the Christian family, to refocus our attention on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, from which we can clarify our vision of what is truly important in our lives: namely our conversion to Christ within the community of the Church.

by Deacon Roger Carr-Jones

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus
I give you my hands to do your work
I give you my feet to go your way
I give you my eyes to see as you do
I give you my tongue to speak your words
I give you my mind that you may think in me
I give you my spirit that you may pray in me
Above all, I give you my heart
that you may love in me
your Father and all mankind
I give you my whole self that you may grow in me
so that it is you Lord Jesus
who live and work and pray in me. Amen
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QUESTION

Everyone we meet has a story to tell and encounters to share. How has your experience of the pandemic been one of spending time in the wilderness? What has the Spirit helped you to be more aware of personally and in the world?

POINT FOR ACTION

Discerning as a group, from everything you have shared in this time together, what steps is the Spirit inviting us to take as we 'journey together' in our parish, or community and the wider church?