

February 18, 2018
1st Sunday of Lent
Mark 1:12-15

12 At once the Spirit drove him [Jesus] out into the desert, 13 and he remained in the desert for forty days, tempted by Satan. He was among wild beasts, and the angels ministered to him.

14 After John had been arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God: 15 "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

Background:

Mark's account of the temptation of Jesus follows right after Jesus is baptized by John in the Jordan. His account of both the baptism and the temptation are very sparse. We might be tempted to fill in the details with what we remember from the descriptions from other gospel accounts. But this might hinder giving adequate reflection on the text that Mark has provided.

The opening verse of this gospel states that the Spirit drove Jesus into the desert. Mark's community would be aware that "the Spirit" was the expression of the great power of God throughout their religious tradition.

Examples of this would include when the Spirit enabled Othniel to help the Jews defeat their enemies:

"Because the Israelites had offended the Lord by forgetting the Lord, their God, and serving the Baals and the Asherahs (foreign gods), the anger of the Lord flared up against them, and he allowed them to fall into the power of Cushan-risha-thaim, king of Aram Naharaim, whom they served for eight years. But when the Israelites cried out to the Lord, he raised up for them a savior, Othniel, son of Caleb's younger brother Kenaz, who rescued them. The *spirit* of the Lord came upon him, and he judged Israel. When he went out to war, the Lord delivered Cushan-risha-thaim, king of Aram, into his power, so that he made him subject." (Judges 3:7-10)

When Samuel anointed the young shepherd, David, as the next King, the Spirit came upon him to guide him.

"Jesse sent and had the young man brought to them. He was ruddy, a youth handsome to behold and making a splendid appearance. The Lord said, 'There--anoint him, for this is he!' Then Samuel, with the horn of oil in hand, anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and from that day on, the *spirit* of the Lord rushed upon David." (1Samuel 16:12-13b)

It was also that same spirit who came upon ordinary people and led them to be great prophets of God. The spirit who had animated so many people throughout their history was now acting once again to drive Jesus into the desert.

In the second verse Mark states that Jesus stayed in the desert for forty days, was tempted by Satan, was in the company of wild beasts, and was ministered to by angels. All of these statements would have been full of meaning for the people for whom Mark was writing. They would have presumed that the declaration of honor that was heard throughout the spirit world at Jesus' baptism would be challenged: "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." (Mark 1:11) While Mark does not give the details of the testing, he lets his audience know that Jesus has prevailed. In the very first verse of Mark's gospel he states, "The beginning of the proclamation of Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God (Mark 1:1). Mark states in the second verse of this reading that Jesus is present in the desert with the wild animals and that angels waited on him. Then in the third verse he begins to describe Jesus as he begins his public ministry. Without stating the details, Mark is indicating that Jesus has come through his trials and has prevailed. That Jesus was among the wild animals and they did him no harm would have suggested to people of the day that the original order of creation as it was in the garden had once again been established.

Reflection Questions:

1. What do you associate with a desert, with dryness, and with being tested?
2. What have been your desert experiences?
3. What would those who heard that Jesus was “driven” into the desert recall? How did the experience of the desert affect their understanding of themselves and their relationship to God?
4. What are some of the ways that Jesus might have been changed by his experience of being in the desert, being tempted, being with the wild animals, and having had the angels minister to him?
5. Do you think there is a connection between Jesus’ experience in the desert and his ability to proclaim, “This is the time of fulfillment”?
6. Given the everyday life of the people of the day, what are some of the things that might have gone through their minds as they heard Jesus proclaim: “This is the time of fulfillment”?
7. When you hear this gospel proclaimed, do you take these words seriously?
8. Where do you see the action of the spirit operating in your life?
9. How will your Lenten practice lead you into an experience of desert, temptation, wild animals, being ministered to by angels, and being able to proclaim that “this is the time of fulfillment”?
10. Can you take some time now to talk with God about whatever thoughts or feelings arose within you as you reflected on this gospel; about your desire for your Lenten journey this year; or about any other thought that you need to bring to God?

The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to.annemarie.lom@gmail.com

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Excerpts from the readings for February 14, 2018, Ash Wednesday

Even now, says the Lord, return to me with your whole heart, with fasting, and weeping, and mourning; Rend your hearts, not your garments, and return to the Lord, your God.

For gracious and merciful is he, slow to anger, rich in kindness, and relenting in punishment.

Perhaps he will again relent and leave behind him a blessing, offerings for the Lord, your God.

Blow the trumpet in Zion! proclaim a fast, call an assembly; gather the people, notify the congregation; assemble the elders, gather the children and the infants; let the bridegroom quit his room and the bride her chamber. Between the porch and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep, and say, “Spare, O Lord, your people, and make not your heritage a reproach, with the nations ruling over them! Why should they say among the peoples, ‘Where is their God?’”

Then the Lord was stirred to concern for his land and took pity on his people.

Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.

Have mercy on me, O God, in your goodness; in the greatness of your compassion wipe out my offense. Thoroughly wash me from my guilt and of my sin cleanse me.

*For I acknowledge my offense, and my sin is before me always:
"Against you only have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight."
A clean heart create for me, O God, and a steadfast spirit renew within me.
Cast me not out from your presence, and your Holy Spirit take not from me.
Give me back the joy of your salvation, and a willing spirit sustain in me.
O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall proclaim your praise.*

Brothers and sisters: We are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who did not know sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him. Working together, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For he says: In an acceptable time I heard you, and on the day of salvation I helped you. Behold, now is a very acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

Jesus said to his disciples: "Take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them; otherwise, you will have no recompense from your heavenly Father. When you give alms, do not blow a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do to win the praise of others. They have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing, so that your almsgiving may be secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you. "When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them. They have received their reward. But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. Your Father who sees in secret will repay you. "When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites. They neglect their appearance, so that they may appear to others to be fasting. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to be fasting."

Excerpts from Joel 2:12-18; Psalm 51:3-6, 12-14, 17; 2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2; and Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

Excerpts from the readings for February 18, 2018, the **First Sunday of Lent**

God said to Noah and to his sons with him: "See, I am now establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you and with every living creature that was with you: all the birds, and the various tame and wild animals that were with you and came out of the ark. I will establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all bodily creatures be destroyed by the waters of a flood; there shall not be another flood to devastate the earth." God added: "This is the sign that I am giving for all ages to come, of the covenant between me and you and every living creature with you: I set my bow in the clouds to serve as a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth, and the bow appears in the clouds, I will recall the covenant I have made between me and you and all living beings, so that the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all mortal beings."

Your ways, O Lord, are love and truth to those who keep your covenant.
Your ways, O Lord, make known to me; teach me your paths,
Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my savior.
Remember that your compassion, O Lord, and your love are from of old.

In your kindness remember me, because of your goodness, O Lord.
Good and upright is the Lord, thus he shows sinners the way.
He guides the humble to justice, and he teaches the humble his way.

Beloved: Christ suffered for sins once, the righteous for the sake of the unrighteous, that he might lead you to God. Put to death in the flesh, he was brought to life in the Spirit. In it he also went to preach to the spirits in prison, who had once been disobedient while God waited in the days of Noah during the building of the ark, in which a few persons were saved through water. This prefigured baptism, which saves you now. It is not a removal of dirt from the body but an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers subject to him. The Spirit drove Jesus out into the desert, and he remained in the desert for forty days, tempted by Satan. He was among wild beasts, and the angels ministered to him. After John had been arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God: "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."
Excerpts from Genesis 9:8-15; Psalm 25:4-9; 1 Peter 3:18-22; and Mark 1:12-15