

February 21, 2021
1st Sunday of Lent
Mark 1:12-15

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."

Background:

Mark's account of the temptation of Jesus follows right after Jesus is baptized by John in the Jordan. The accounts of both the baptism and the temptation are very sparse. There is a temptation to fill in the details with how the temptation of Jesus is described in other gospel accounts. But this could 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 an expression of the great power of God throughout their religious tradition. Some examples include the Spirit that enabled Othniel who helped 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." (1 Samuel 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. Each of these statements would have been filled with meaning for the people for whom Mark is writing. Immediately before Jesus was driven into the desert, Mark recorded that as Jesus came out of the waters of baptism, he heard a voice from heaven declare: "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." (Mark 1:11) Mark's audience would also presume that the entire spirit world would have heard this declaration of honor. The spirit world for their part would take this declaration as a challenge to see if Jesus was truly worthy of such praise.

While Mark does not give the details of the testing by Satan, he lets his readers know that Jesus has prevailed. In very first verse of the gospel he states, "The beginning of the proclamation of Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God. (Mark 1:1) He also states that Jesus is present in the desert with the wild animals, and that angels waited on him. The third verse of this gospel begins to describe Jesus as he begins his public ministry. Without going into the details, Mark is indicating that Jesus has come through his trial and has prevailed. The suggestion that Jesus was among the wild animals and that they

did him no harm would also suggest that the original order of creation as in the garden has been once again established.

Reflection Questions:

1. In what ways have you experienced the desert?
2. How would you complete the phrase; the desert is like...?
3. In what ways have found yourself tested during the last year?
4. Have you discovered strengths or insights into God's presence through this year of living through the pandemic that you did not perceive previously?
5. What do you hear in the simple statement that begins today's gospel: "The Spirit drove Jesus out into the desert?"
6. How does the fact that Jesus emerges from His baptism and being in the desert lead to His proclamation: "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand?"
7. Do you hope that your Lenten practices will lead you into an experience of desert, temptation, wild animals, being ministered to by angels, and/or being able to proclaim that "this is the time of fulfillment?"
8. Can you take some time now to talk with God about whatever thought or feeling arose within you from this gospel, your desire for your Lenten journey this year, or 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

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscs-calledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

Excerpts from the Lectionary for Mass for Use in the Dioceses of the United States of America, second typical edition © 2001, 1998, 1997, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, DC. Used with permission. All rights reserved. No portion of this text may be reproduced by any means without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

Please include the above information when printing or forwarding.

Excerpts from the readings for February 21, 2021, 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

From Joe:

Friends,

Here are the gospel background and reflection questions for February 21st, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. The gospel is another short one from Mark. It tells of Jesus "driven by the Spirit" into the desert, where he is tempted by Satan, among wild beasts, and with angels ministering to him, before he goes back to Galilee to begin proclaiming the gospel. The other readings also have references to such things as Jesus among angels, a time among wild beasts, and the saving alternative, according to the covenant, through the Spirit, for those who are disobedient, thus avoiding another flood as at the time of Noah. In the first reading from Genesis, God tells Noah, "I am establishing my covenant with you and with every tame and wild animal that was with you, that never again shall all creatures be destroyed by a flood." Psalm 25 rejoins, "The Lord shows sinners the way. Your ways, O Lord, are love and truth to those who keep your covenant." In the second reading, from his first letter, Peter writes, "Christ suffered for sins, that he might lead you to God. Brought to life in the Spirit, he is with angels in heaven, at the right hand of God, who patiently waited during the building of the ark."