

1st Sunday of Lent, B

“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.”

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This is the total story that Mark has to tell us today. Jesus’ time in the desert for forty days should be our model for Lent. Like Jesus, we should try to spend a special time - **forty days** - preparing ourselves, reflecting, praying, knowing the hard path that comes, and anticipating the happy Easter celebration that follows.

In our hurried world, I do not want us to rush through these forty days. We are always rushing through things as it is - we are always counting down to something else, counting the days until birthdays, until Christmas, until payday, until school is out, or until vacation. I hate to do that with Lent too - just count down until Easter, and waste the time we have, miss the opportunity for digging deeper spiritually, skipping over the process of looking inside of ourselves, trying to reconstruct ourselves, letting ourselves be remade by God. I want more from Lent, for all of us, and I want more from Mark on this time in Jesus’ life, this time where we can see the human Jesus, struggling to make the right choices, just like we do.

We don't have a choice. We must work with our two sentences. That is all that Mark gave us. We must think what does it mean? What is Mark telling us? Does Mark want us to believe that this time in the desert for forty days was not a big deal to Jesus? And that Jesus' forty days in the desert should not be important for us? Doesn't Mark think the details are important?

In Mark's understanding, what happens in the wilderness with Jesus and Satan is important. For Mark, the fruits of Jesus' time in the desert are clear in the next verses of the gospel: after his forty days away, Jesus immediately gets to work, beginning to preach and proclaim the good news about the kingdom of God coming near. We do not need the details because we know the conclusion – Jesus' time in the wilderness sets the character for his ministry that moves nonstop once it begins, as Jesus interacts, according to Mark, all the time with people - healing, teaching, and loving.

I am sure that nobody in this church would probably want to list every experience we have had, every sin we have committed, and every mistake we have made for the rest of the congregation. No doubt we all have experienced temptation. We all have had dry times in our lives, empty times, times where we have done some serious soul-searching, where we have had to decide whether we could pull ourselves together, whether we were going to walk a path with God or not. These times, difficult and painful, are also

valuable. They shape us and make us who we are. They have their place in our life stories. But our stories do not stop there. Instead, what we experience in the wilderness sets the quality for the rest of our lives. It is what will tell others what we learned and experienced in the desert times. Maybe we have mistakes and faults and shortcomings that are keeping us from moving forward. But Mark reminds us to just get on with it already - to live, to learn, to repent, to be forgiven, and to share the good news that we have found in Jesus Christ.

In this season of Lent, I hope we can find that our experiences bring us more to think about and talk about than two sentences from the gospel of Saint Mark. I hope we do not let ourselves get caught up in only our failings and uselessness in this season of self-reflection.

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

God has much more to offer for us. Our discipleship is only shaped by where we have been. It is characterized by where we want to go, and who we are following to get there. Let's get on with it. Get on with proclaiming the message of love and grace.
Amen.