

Proclamation of the Gospel

The Lord be with you.
And with your Spirit.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to St. Mark.
Glory to You, O Lord.

The Spirit drove Jesus out into the desert and He stayed in the wasteland 40 days. He was put to the test there by Satan. He was with the wild beasts and Angels waited on Him. After John's arrest Jesus appeared in Galilee proclaiming God's Good News, "This is the time of fulfillment. The reign of God is at hand. Reform your lives and believe in the Good News."

The Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ.

Homily by Fr. Gerry Hurley

I want to thank you for continuing to be responsive to our parable. We will continue to reflect on it throughout this Lenten season and see the learning and hear the learning experience. Thank you, Eddie Borne and thank you Lori for your contributions this week which are on the bulletin. Great reflections and great invitations to us in terms of continuing to grow.

The gospel — very simple, very intriguing. Yes? Yes, very simple, very directive. Saint Mark, just proclaiming the Spirit drove Jesus out into the desert, and He remained there in the desert for 40 days tempted by Satan. He was among wild beasts and angels ministered to Him there. Many ways of looking at it — sort of like he drove Him out and then he said, "Hey, see you later. We'll catch up and we'll talk about your experience. That would be one perspective. Many other perspectives — what was Jesus doing for 40 days out there? What would it be like to spend 40 days out in the desert? Would you like to do it? No. I haven't met to many that would. Quite a challenge, quite a difficulty indeed. Maybe 40 hours, and even that would be risky enough, right?

Rodney and his companions went for 40 hours, but they didn't live out in the desert. They had the retreat house. But a marvelous idea, which is the same thing. It doesn't have to be the desert. It's the idea of withdrawing, pulling away from in order to be reflective — in order to help one to be dedicated — in order to hear His voice. I like to think of Jesus going out into the desert among the wild beasts, and just being attentive to God, being in communion with God. Imagine if you had the opportunity to do it. What worries or anxieties would you have? Hey, I know I'd have the worries about what creatures are gonna come around. When you're trying to worry about the creatures coming around at night, it would probably keep you from sleeping so you would be tired

or you might sleep during the day and reverse things and stay awake in the darkness....many intriguing things.

But, for Jesus it was about being in communion with all of His creation, and the Spirit driving Him. You ever have that sense of being driven to do something? What a neat experience. Being driven by the Spirit has got to be a pretty powerful experience. Jesus is driven by that Spirit to be in communion with the Father. And then, the question — where do I withdraw to be with the Father? 40 hours? Like our friends who went on the retreat. The Jesuits have made a great tradition of that practice — inviting people to come away — men spending three days in the quiet and being reflective. They have a spiritual director that they meet with once a day. And he guides them, giving them Scriptural passages to be reflective on, and then bringing back and sharing their insights.

Like Paula D’Arcy, whom we talked about for the past two weeks. Paula, in her *Gift of the Redbird*, she tells the story of going out for three days into the wilderness. Absolutely bringing no food or anything else. But just being out there in communion, like Jesus. What an experience of growth, and challenge, and invitation. I’d be thinking, hey one of the best parts is finishing it, not necessarily being there or going through. What challenges. It begs the question — Where do I withdrawal in order to hear His voice? Because it becomes ever more important as we live in this world with all of the noise, and the many different noises and voices that vie for my attention. Imagine allowing yourself that grace. Not 40 days, but maybe just 40 hours, retreating, going away, leaving family and friends to be in communion with Him and attentive to Him.

Lent an invitation above all else to look at balance in our lives. That’s why we pulled out from our things the weighing scales, again. Because during Lent, I want to be reflective on that. How balanced? Where is the balance in my life? How valuable is it. We used that image a number years ago, you may remember. We had it here during Lent, and I thought let’s go back to that. It’s a good image. We had it when we reflected on “The Seven Deadly Sins” during the Lenten period, what was it — five years ago? Looking at the balance. Where’s the balance in my life? What a value balance is. What a valuable thing to withdraw sometimes to find and to experience that balance. What kind of a balance is there in my life at the present time between what God is going to do in my life, and what I’m going to do?

Most of us were raised as Catholics. Particularly if we’ve grown up in this tradition, we’ve been raised with the real awareness and sense of what we are going to do. I’m going to say the Rosary. I’m going to go to Mass. I’m going to pick up this for Lent. I’m going to... I’m going to... I’m going to... I’m going to... What about what He is going to do, and what He desires to do? How do I strike a healthy balance in those realities?

I think given much of our Catholic tradition and practice, we’ve gotta go, we’ve gotta do this, we’ve gotta do this to be really good — to be good Catholics, and good boys and girls, or good men and women. We have a heavy dose of that — what I’m going to do.

What about what He desires to do? What kind of space and forum do I provide for that to take place?

Story of a good wife — she noticed when she was in her husband's workshop, she noticed on his bench that this vice was broken. And so she decided, without asking him, that she would go ahead and replace the vice for his birthday. So, she went down to the local hardware store, and she said to the sales representative, "Do you have any heavy duty vices?" And he said, "No, I give them all up for Lent!" A very Catholic kind of perspective, really. Because we have been obsessed with that kind of an idea. I'm going to give this up for Lent, or I'm going to give that up for Lent. And I'm going to work at making God be more pleased with me. One of the fundamental truths is: He couldn't be more pleased with me than He is. He couldn't be more pleased with me. But, I've got to convince myself of that reality, of that truth. And even in, and we see it constantly throughout the Scriptures, He is intensely pleased with us.

Now, that doesn't mean that we can't improve ourselves and get rid of some of our vices. They are very good. But if I have all the driving force and all of the driving power in this, when does God have an opportunity to accomplish in me some of the things He wants to accomplish? In other words, the question — "What Am I Here on Earth For?" Does He really have a purpose for me? And, how would I know it if I take all of the control and if I have a lack of balance where it's heavily weighted on the side of what I'm going to do? What am I gonna do for Lent? And what I'm gonna do next, and what I'm going to do throughout the year. If it is so heavily weighted on what I am gonna do. I could do a lot of things, but not know Him. Wouldn't that be a tragedy after doing all of those things? That I would spend so much time doing things for God, having in mind the intentions of God, and still not know the God that I am serving.

So, during Lent, what a neat idea! Let's have a balance. Great balance between what I am going to do, and what I'm going to provide Him an opportunity to do, or to bring about, or to bring about fulfillment in my life.

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