

1st Sunday of Lent, Year B

GOSPEL

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The Spirit drove Jesus out into the wilderness and he remained there for forty days, and was tempted by Satan. He was with the wild beasts, and the angels looked after him.

After John had been arrested, Jesus went into Galilee. There he proclaimed the Good News from God. 'The time has come' he said 'and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the Good News.'

(Mark 1:12–15)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- Lent lasts for forty days in imitation of Jesus' forty days in the wilderness. Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Holy Thursday.
- There is evidence of Lenten preparation for Easter very early in the Church's history but its practices became more regularised after the Council of Nicaea (325CE).
- Each Lent all the baptised are expected to adopt the three Lenten disciplines of prayer, fasting and almsgiving to those in need.
- In years gone by, Catholics did not eat meat on any Friday, and later, on Fridays in Lent. Today there are two days of the year when Catholics are expected to not eat meat—Ash Wednesday and Good Friday—but all the Fridays of Lent are still days when we should 'fast'.
- This scene in the gospel has been traditionally associated with the Judean wilderness, an unforgiving desert landscape in the south of the country.

EXPLORING THE WORD

The Baptist had promised that Jesus would baptise with the Holy Spirit, and at his baptism the Holy Spirit had descended on him. Now that same Spirit drives Jesus into the wilderness. He is not the master of his own destiny. He is the object of the action of God. There is no murmur of opposition to this. Jesus accepts God's Spirit and God's will. As a consequence, the harmony of creation is restored and Jesus 'is with' the wild beasts. It is a fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah that 'the wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion and fatling together' (Isaiah 11:6–7). The new creation has begun in the person of Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God. Indeed, he proclaims that the Kingdom of God is close at hand.

But Jesus also summons his followers to repent and believe the Good News. Lent is a time to listen attentively to the Gospel and to turn back to the ways of the Father. It is a time for us to consider how close we are to the Kingdom of God.

- What is 'good' for you at this point about the Good News of Jesus Christ?
- Jesus heralds the new creation. What would be the perfect world for you? Describe what might be different from our present reality in the Kingdom of God. How can you help to bring this about?
- What tempts you away from the Good News?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- What comforts and distractions make it difficult for you to follow Jesus' way? Can you dispense with these for the forty days of Lent? Can you, instead, take on additional tasks or disciplines to assist you in walking with God?
- The Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness. Share stories of times when you felt 'driven' to do a particular thing. How did you respond to this urge? What were the consequences?
- How do you experience 'the wilderness' in your life? What are the 'wild beasts' for you in this place? Who or what looks after you?
- Many catechumens are on the final approach to saying 'the time has come'. How do you feel about 'the Kingdom of God being close at hand' for you?
- What extra steps can you take to prepare for full entry into the Church?
- The response to today's psalm makes a wonderful prayer for this week:

*Your ways, O Lord, are love and truth,
to those who keep your covenant.*

