

I LENT 2016
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ST. MATTHEW 4.1



God didn't abandon Jesus in the desert and he doesn't abandon us either. Lent is about having confidence in God to keep us safe from the Devil's attempts to trick us.

According to this morning's Gospel Jesus went off by himself into the desert to be tested by the Devil. The desert was the place people went to fast and pray especially if there was about to be a major change in their lives.

This Wednesday, Friday and Saturday are the Lenten Ember Days. The Ember Days occur roughly at each of the four seasons and are days on which we pray for an increase in vocations to the priesthood. Before a man is ordained a priest he will often go away for several days of prayer and fasting...his ordination will be a major life-changing event for him and those around him.

We might ask ourselves why Jesus allowed himself to be tempted...tested...by the Devil. The simplest answer...it was for us. Jesus was getting himself ready to begin his public ministry...the life-changing event for him. After the time he spent in the desert fasting and praying he experienced the basic human need for food...he was hungry.

Enter *Satan*...whose name means *adversary* and *accuser*. He is the Great Deceiver and the Big Liar. He tries to trick Jesus with his lies and he tries to trick us. His attempt to trick Jesus into working against God was an exercise in futility. Jesus allowed himself to be tested to show his full humanity. Everything we experience...good or bad...he has experienced. He allowed himself to be tested by the Devil for us...it wasn't about him.

Lent is our time in the desert with Jesus. Our journey began on Ash Wednesday...our journey will eventually lead out of the desert and on the road with Jesus to Jerusalem and Good Friday. We will experience through the Church's Liturgies the entire journey...desert to cross. The journey may get bumpy at times...we may find Satan playing tricks on us...we will learn to say to him what Jesus said to him..."Leave us alone and go back where you belong."

What we learn from the time Jesus spent in the desert and from his being tested is how not to give in to our own temptations. We are most likely to give in when we are vulnerable and have our defenses down. We never like talking about sin...Lent is about confronting our sins...those we act on and those we try to keep secret...and when it comes to God...he sees and knows everything.

We talk about guilt...guilt is the thing that tells us we need to make some changes in our lives for the better. Lent is a time for us to be productive and proactive. We begin our Lenten journey in the desert...we need to make certain we don't think we are so far out in the desert we are lost forever and God can't reach us. Guilt can work against us.

Father Henri Nouwen, a Dutch-born Roman Catholic priest, wrote these compelling words about guilt...

...“There is an awareness of sin that does not lead us to God but to self-preoccupation. Our temptation is to be so impressed by our sins and failings and so overwhelmed by our lack of generosity that we get stuck in a paralyzing guilt. It is a guilt that says: ‘I am too sinful to deserve God’s mercy.’ It is the guilt that leads to introspection, instead of directing our eyes toward God. It is the guilt that has become an idol and therefore a form of pride.”

The Devil loves to play mind games on us. It's his specialty. One of those mind games is to try to get us to trap ourselves in our own guilt and into thinking we're not worth saving. Wrong! Lent is about confronting our guilt and getting rid of it so we can move forward in our journey.

We can't deceive ourselves into thinking the Devil won't try to test us...he will take every opportunity to derail our lives...especially when we are most vulnerable. That's why we need to keep our defenses up. There is no such thing as "the Devil made me do it". We learn from Jesus the Devil has no power over us unless we give up hope.

God didn't abandon Jesus in the desert and he doesn't abandon us either. Lent is about having confidence in God to keep us safe from the Devil's tricks...now and always.

And let's remember everything Jesus did he did for us!

