

I LENT 2017

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

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ST. MATTHEW 4.1



Deserts can be great places to go to get away from our hectic and sometimes overwhelming daily lives. Monasteries are often located in deserts...far away from traffic jams and cell phone calls.

Getting away from it all can be a good thing...time away at a monastery or retreat house can help us get refreshed...and refocus our lives on God.

This Wednesday, Friday and Saturday are the Lenten Ember Days. They occur roughly at the four seasons and are days we are directed to pray for the increase in vocations to the priesthood.

Ordination is a life-changing event. A man who is about to be ordained a priest tries to spend several days on a retreat to prepare his heart and mind and soul for what is about to happen. He is doing what Jesus did when he went into the desert to get ready for his public ministry.

Deserts can provide the solitude needed for spiritual reflection and renewal...they can also be deceptive. If we are not properly prepared, without food and water we can easily become confused and lose our way. The desert can trick our minds into thinking and behaving irrationally.

Lent is our time in the desert. Our Wednesday Lenten Study this year will focus on the Parables of Jesus. We will spend time alone and together reading parables and discovering the "treasures" they offer. We will understand...grow...reflect...and act...on what they teach us...what Jesus teaches us through them.

While we are out in the desert we need to make certain we don't get tricked into thinking our lives are so out of order and become so wracked with guilt we think even God can't help us find the way out. Satan loves to play with our minds...he tried that with Jesus...we know Jesus told Satan to leave him alone and go back where he belonged.

Guilt serves its purpose by calling attention to areas of our lives that are indeed out of order and need God's help in regaining control...but guilt should not rule us any more than caving in to harmful thoughts or activities should.

Dutch-born Roman Catholic priest Father Henri J.M. Nouwen wrote:

...“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.”

Satan is the expert when it comes to pride. He thought he was better than God and we know where that got him. He was foolish in thinking he could get Jesus to do anything he asked. God was not about to leave Jesus alone and lost in the desert with no way out.

Lent is our time in the desert and we should be using this time to think about *“the things we should have done but haven’t...and the things we should not have done...but have.”* We should not deceive ourselves into thinking the Devil won't try to test us even during our desert getaway...but God does not leave us alone or without help.

It's worth remembering Father Nouwen's words quoted in the Ash Wednesday Homily:

“God’s love for his people should not be forgotten. It should remain with us in the present. When everything is dark, when we are surrounded by despairing voices, when we do not see any exits, then we can find salvation in a remembered love, a love that is not simply a wistful recollection of a bygone past, but a living force that sustains us in the present.”

Let's make our Lenten desert "retreat" a time of understanding, growth, reflection and action...let God's love go to work in us.

