



Bringing Home the Word

First Sunday of Lent (B)
February 21, 2021

Navigating the Desert

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

Like Noah being prepared to navigate the Flood, so the Spirit sent Jesus into the desert. Why was he sent there? Did he need to learn something he didn't know? Did he lack something he needed? Jesus as God didn't lack anything, of course, but he needed time to pray, reflect, and prepare for his mission. He also wanted to set an example to follow. Another Scripture says he went into the desert to be tempted by the devil. That time of spiritual combat was helpful for him.

We also need to go through trials and crises to grow both in our spiritual lives and human maturity. We each have had our desert where we are challenged to our core and stretched beyond our limits. Perhaps it was a crisis such as a health, employment, or relational issue. But it doesn't always have to be such a dramatic event. It can be as simple and constant as the prolonged embracing of daily challenges in a manner that leads to life. We probably look back and see these as some of our best times—if we truly encountered ourselves and our Lord.

The key is in peaceful acceptance, looking for what good can be learned from these inconveniences. In every cross there is a resurrection; in every storm a rainbow assures us of God's presence and victory. It tells us that clouds and storms will not lead to total death, but rather to a purified rebirth, growth, and newfound life and strength. He has promised us this. +

Sunday Readings

Genesis 9:8-15

[God said,] "I set my bow in the clouds to serve as a sign of the covenant between me and the earth."

1 Peter 3:18-22

[Baptism] is not a removal of dirt from the body but an appeal to God for a clear conscience.

Mark 1:12-15

[Jesus said,] "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

In every cross there is a resurrection; in every storm a rainbow assures us of God's presence and victory.

A Word from Pope Francis

Let us invite Jesus into the boats of our lives. Let us hand over our fears to him so that he can conquer them. Like the disciples, we will experience that with him on board there will be no shipwreck. Because this is God's strength... He brings serenity into our storms, because with God life never dies.

—Extraordinary Moment of Prayer for the COVID-19 Pandemic, March 27, 2020



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- What important lessons have I learned from a challenge in my life?
- Can I share that lesson with a friend or family member?

Becoming the Paschal Mystery

By Johan van Parys

Have you ever wondered where Lent comes from? The word *Lent* comes from the Middle English word *lente*, which means “spring.” Just as new life abounds in spring, during Lent we prepare to celebrate new life at Easter.

The origin of Lent can be traced back to a period of intense fasting and praying in preparation for adult baptism. In some Christian communities this period lasted anywhere from a few days or a few weeks to the symbolic forty days. Our current forty-day Lenten fast refers back to the forty days of Jesus and the forty years of Israel’s people spent in the desert.

It was determined that Easter Vigil would be the best time to celebrate baptism, and forty days of preparation before Easter became a custom. Currently the period of preparation for Easter known as Lent is recognized by the entire community; it used to be recognized only by catechumens planning to be baptized during the Easter Vigil.

Lent also became the time for great penance by those who belonged to the Order of Penitents as the precursor to the sacrament of reconciliation, which was created to allow people to repent for grave sins. The bishop admitted sinners to the Order of Penitents during a special rite that included the use of ashes. A remnant of this rite is found in our Ash Wednesday service.

Members of the Order of Penitents were excluded from the sacraments and



expected to dedicate their lives to prayer and penance. Once a year, on Holy Thursday, the bishop welcomed those who were ready to be readmitted to the Church and the sacraments. Penitents would intensify their prayer and penance during the days leading up to Easter.

Today, these two movements toward the sacraments of initiation and reconciliation characterize the season of Lent. Lent is indeed the time of final preparation for those who will join the Catholic Church during the Easter Vigil. Those who are already members are called to reconcile with God and the Church so they can celebrate Easter in a worthy manner.

In addition, Lent offers three disciplines as part of the preparation for initiation and reconciliation: fasting, praying, and giving of alms (charity or care for others). Prayer allows us to reconnect with God. Without this relationship, our Church membership is a mere exercise in following rules and regulations. Penance helps us reconnect with ourselves as an exercise in removing everything that clouds our vision. Giving alms enables us to reconnect with others as an exercise in sharing.

May the celebration of this great season of Lent be a time of sincere penance, prayer, and sharing so that, in a renewed spirit, we may become the paschal mystery we celebrate. +

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only by catechumens
planning to be baptized
during the Easter Vigil.***

PRAYER

Lord, strengthen my resolve to be faithful to your covenant of love and be more compassionate and generous toward all people.

—From *Mindful Meditations for Every Day of Lent and Easter*, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

February 22–27

Monday, The Chair of St. Peter the Apostle:
1 Pt 5:1–4 / Mt 16:13–19


Tuesday, Lenten Weekday:
Is 55:10–11 / Mt 6:7–15

Wednesday, Lenten Weekday:
Jon 3:1–10 / Lk 11:29–32

Thursday, Lenten Weekday:
Est C:12, 14–16, 23–25 / Mt 7:7–12

Friday, Lenten Weekday:
Ez 18:21–28 / Mt 5:20–26

Saturday, Lenten Weekday:
Dt 26:16–19 / Mt 5:43–48

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