

INTO THE DESERT!

(MARK 1:12-15)



Jesus' forty-day stay in the desert follows immediately the story of his baptism; at that event, the Spirit comes upon him and he is revealed as the Son of God.

It is this Spirit which drives him, almost violently, out into the wilderness. It is better that we appreciate this episode as Jesus "being tested", rather than "being tempted": in modern speech temptation is usually associated with sin, or at least with something wrong or not quite right. It is much more serious than that: it centres on how Jesus understands what it means to be the Son of God. Before Jesus begins his public ministry, it is important that he be put to this test. We might note that although Satan is mentioned, Satan is merely the agent, the means: it is the Spirit who subjects Jesus to the ordeal.

Unlike Matthew and Luke, Mark gives us no details about Jesus' struggle, he simply reports the fact. Jesus' fast of forty days recalls those of Moses and Elijah: the mention of the number forty also evokes the memory of Israel's experience in the desert during the Exodus journey, during which the people were tested "to see what was in their heart". Wild beasts are often associated in the Bible with powers opposed to God, but there is also a positive vision of human beings living peacefully with such other creatures. Later in Mark, the evangelist will present the vision of a new creation.

Once Jesus has passed the test, he is ready to undertake his mission of proclaiming the kingdom of God and sets off into Galilee. ■

SAY

Lord, make me walk in your truth, and teach me: for you are God my saviour.

(Psalm 24:5)

LEARN

It is better to understand Jesus' experience in the desert as his being "tested" rather than "tempted".

Fasting is a means of heightening our spiritual awareness and perception.

It is the Spirit which puts Jesus to the test: Satan is simply the means by which this is achieved.

DO

Prepare a container of some sort for the money you will save from your Lenten penance. One of the practices of Lent is almsgiving; what we put aside, we are supposed to give to charity, which is the modern form of almsgiving.

REFLECT

What are you giving up for Lent? Perhaps someone has asked you this already. Many people see Lent as an endurance test: if they manage to reach Easter with their resolution intact, they can take some pride in the fact; if they have broken their resolution, they can feel downhearted and defeated – again! But this is to miss the point: such an attitude is, literally, self-centred – we are concentrated on ourselves and our own efforts, whereas

the season of Lent is all about ourselves and our relationship with God.

One of the purposes of fasting is to make us more spiritually aware: the less our body has to do, the more heightened our spiritual senses can be. If we eat or drink less and spend more time in quiet prayer, then all sorts of thoughts will arise in our mind. The lack of distraction can be very unsettling: we may be faced with all sorts of uncomfortable questions that

we would rather not think about. It might help us to remember that even Jesus had to struggle with questions about himself before he could embark on his public mission as the Son of God empowered by the Spirit. We are daughters and sons of God through baptism: this Lent, the Spirit is asking us to reflect on how we each understand that truth. Difficult, perhaps, but worth the effort. ■

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

When he calls on me, I will answer him;
I will deliver him and give him glory,
I will grant him length of days.

COLLECT

Grant, almighty God,
through the yearly observances of holy Lent,
that we may grow in understanding
of the riches hidden in Christ
and by worthy conduct pursue their effects.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of
the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

FIRST READING

Genesis 9:8-15

A reading from the book of Genesis.

God spoke to Noah and his sons, "See, I establish my Covenant with you, and with your descendants after you; also with every living creature to be found with you, birds, cattle and every wild beast with you: everything that came out of the ark, everything that lives on the earth. I establish my Covenant with you: no thing of flesh shall be swept away again by the waters of the flood. There shall be no flood to destroy the earth again."

God said, "Here is the sign of the Covenant I make between myself and you and every living creature with you for all generations: I set my bow in the clouds and it shall be a sign of the Covenant between me and the earth. When I gather the clouds over the earth and the bow appears in the clouds, I will recall the Covenant between myself and you and every living creature of every kind. And so the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all things of flesh."

The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

PSALM

Psalm 24

Response:

**Your ways, Lord, are faithfulness and love
for those who keep your covenant.**

1. Lord, make me know your ways.
Lord, teach me your paths.
Make me walk in your truth, and teach me:
for you are God my saviour. (R.)
2. Remember your mercy, Lord,
and the love you have shown from of old.
In your love remember me,
because of your goodness, O Lord. (R.)
3. The Lord is good and upright.
He shows the path to those who stray,
he guides the humble in the right path;
he teaches his way to the poor. (R.)

SECOND READING

1 Peter 3:18-22

A reading from the first letter of St Peter.

Christ himself, innocent though he was, died once for sins, died for the guilty, to lead us to God. In the body he was put to death, in the spirit he was raised to life, and, in the spirit, he went to preach to the spirits in prison. Now it was long ago, when Noah was still building that ark which saved only a small group of eight people "by water", and when

God was still waiting patiently, that these spirits refused to believe. That water is a type of the baptism which saves you now, and which is not the washing off of physical dirt but a pledge made to God from a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has entered heaven and is at God's right hand, now that he has made the angels and Dominations and Powers his subjects.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

**Praise to you, O Christ, king of eternal glory!
Man does not live on bread alone,
but on every word that comes from the
mouth of God.
Praise to you, O Christ, king of eternal glory!**

GOSPEL

Mark 1:12-15

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark.

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."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

PROFESSION OF FAITH

**I believe in God,
the Father almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,**

(all bow during the next two lines)

**who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried;
he descended into hell;
on the third day he rose again from the dead;
he ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of God the
Father almighty;
from there he will come to judge the living
and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and life everlasting. Amen.**

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

Give us the right dispositions, O Lord, we pray,
to make these offerings,
for with them we celebrate the beginning
of this venerable and sacred time.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

**One does not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes forth from the
mouth of God.**

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Renewed now with heavenly bread,
by which faith is nourished, hope increased,

and charity strengthened,
we pray, O Lord,
that we may learn to hunger for Christ,
the true and living Bread,
and strive to live by every word
which proceeds from your mouth.
Amen.

It is the saying of holy men that, if we wish to be perfect, we have nothing more to do than to perform the ordinary duties of the day well. A short road to perfection – short, not because easy, but because pertinent and intelligible. There are no short ways to perfection, but there are sure ones.

St John Henry Newman

