

SPIRITUALITY

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Matt 4:4b

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

Gospel

Mark 1:12-15; L23B

The Spirit drove Jesus out into
the desert,
and he remained in the desert
for forty days, tempted by
Satan.

He was among wild beasts,
and the angels ministered to
him.

After John had been arrested,
Jesus came to Galilee proclaim-
ing the gospel of God:
“This is the time of fulfillment.
The kingdom of God is at hand.
Repent, and believe in the gospel.”



Reflecting on the Gospel

Upon making a commitment, how often do we start out with strong intentions, firm will, and fortitude? Perhaps nothing represents that more in our modern culture than a New Year's resolution. We see and hear ads for gym memberships and diet plans flooding the internet and the airwaves during those first few weeks of January. So many of us are resolute in those weeks. But once a hurdle is in our path we can quickly stumble. Sometimes we can make a commitment to exercise daily, and that routine is manageable for a few days, or even a few weeks. But we also face other priorities in the midst of our goal to exercise daily. Pretty soon, exercising is a long-gone wish.

Jesus faced something much more profound than a New Year's resolution or an intention to exercise daily. Upon being baptized and starting his ministry, he was immediately faced with temptation. He was driven into the desert, a place of no consolation, no respite, and no refreshment. The experience of knowing he is God's Son gives way to isolation and solitude in a harsh environment.

As a human being, Jesus knew temptation; the gospel is clear about that. But for many Christians it can be difficult to imagine that Jesus was truly tempted, for he was also divine. And yet as he was fully human he was truly tempted. Despite these real temptations, he overcame them. Mark does not tell us much about this period, unlike Luke, for example, with the many scenes of Jesus conversing with Satan. Mark is intent to tell us in sparse text, without wasting a word, that Jesus was tempted by Satan. Jesus was fully human and experienced temptation as we do.

As Jesus was tempted we too will be tempted. Perhaps even our profound experience of faith and trust in God is tested. But after this period of testing Jesus returns to Galilee, his home, and proclaims the Gospel. In this he is a model for us, who will not live without temptation. We might have an experience of desolation that God is not with us in our trials. But like Jesus we can undergo this experience and emerge stronger, with the courage to proclaim the Gospel.

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Living the Paschal Mystery

Our lives are filled with many competing priorities. Sometimes we call these “distractions” or temptations. But it is important for us to wisely discern between distractions/temptations and merely competing priorities. Family responsibilities, for example, are hardly temptations, but they can sometimes pull us in directions we do not enjoy or that are not always life-giving. Perhaps this is why they are called “responsibilities.” Life-giving activities are from the Spirit of God. Pursuits that pull us away from who we are called to be are better called “temptations.” This is where the example of Jesus can be so powerful.

Jesus was, and was called to be, the Son of God. Mark tells us about this experience at Jesus' baptism. Yet immediately after his baptism, Jesus was in the desert for forty days, being tempted, only to return to his home, true to his mission, to preach the Gospel.

Often we know who we are called to be. Even in the midst of temptation, or desolation, we know who we are and what we ought to do. Following Christ does not mean a life on easy street without trials or perils. Quite the opposite.

The Christian life is beset by obstacles, temptations, and pitfalls. As Jesus did, we are called to proclaim the Gospel, whether we do that at home, in our workplace, or with friends.

Focusing the Gospel

Mark 1:12-15

Every year the Lenten season begins in the desert. Mark's brief account of Jesus' forty days in the desert takes place immediately after Jesus' baptism. Driven by the Spirit, Jesus' going to the desert is an act of obedience to the Father. This is a time for contemplation and discernment regarding the tremendous task before him.

The word "Satan" comes from the Hebrew word for "adversary." Satan serves as Jesus' adversary, tempting him along another path. And this was in the truest sense, a "temptation" for Jesus, who was not merely play-acting. But Jesus never succumbed to the adversary's temptation. Thus, Mark's portrait of Jesus in the desert is that of God's son and Messiah overcoming temptation and re-emerging to preach the gospel.

Focusing the First Reading

Gen 9:8-15

Today's first reading recounts God's covenant with Noah. The first Christians saw in the Noah tale an image of baptism: a new world, free from sin, cleansed by the flood waters and God makes a covenant with humanity. After their forty days and nights adrift in the ark, Noah and his family begin the task of reestablishing God's creation.

Focusing the Responsorial Psalm

Ps 25:4-5, 6-7, 8-9

Covenant and journey are the themes of today's responsorial psalm. Humanity's covenant with God, reestablished in the faithfulness of Noah and his clan, is centered in God's compassion and justice. The psalm also praises God as the source of true wisdom: God is the guide and teacher who marks our life's journey by way of justice and humility.

Focusing the Second Reading

1 Pet 3:18-22

In Christ, God has again raised up his beloved sons and daughters from the tombs of their sins. The writer of the First Letter of Peter picks up the baptismal theme of the Noah story: God again restores life through water and recreates our fallen world through Christ.

PROMPTS FOR HOMILISTS, CATECHISTS, AND RCIA TEAMS

What form does "Satan" most powerfully take in your life?

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How can you bring a sense of stillness to your life this Lent?

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What would you like to recreate and transform in your life this Lent?

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What temptation do you find hardest to resist?

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