

Homily for the 1st Week of Lent

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As we begin the Lenten Season, again we are invited to the real presence of God. In the Gospel, we hear that Jesus was led into the desert. In the desert, He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and He was tempted.

The desert is a symbol of death. No one can live in the desert. Imagine the desert landscape. It is largely uninhabitable and is full of dangers for everyone. Danger from scorching heat by day and extreme cold at night and danger from wild animals, plus the lack of food and the scarcity of water. In the desert, people realize their limitation and weakness. People will really cry out and seek for God's love and mercy there. In great shortage, we can see people cannot live alone and cannot survive without God's love and mercy.

That is why the desert is a place of suffering and hardship, but also a place where we can find God's presence. We can do nothing without God. The desert is a place of death, but, at the same time a place of purification to God's love.

As you know, the chosen people of Israel wandered forty years in the wilderness before they entered the Promised Land. Forty years in the desert was a time of purification and preparation. In the desert, God was walking with them. So, the desert was a place of testing, encounter, and renewal.

Now, before we enter the great joy of Easter, we are entering the Lenten Season for forty days. In this journey of Lent, we also need to go to the desert, as the Israelites did for forty years and as Jesus did for forty days.

For this spiritual journey to the desert, we will find God's love and mercy, and then we will experience His real presence there. This journey of Lent is a time of dying to the body, but at the same time, a time of blessing for the soul. Lent is a time of testing our minds, encountering of God's love, and renewing of our faith in prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

In the journey to the desert during the Lent, we will be tempted as Jesus was. Temptation and failure are a part of life. Almost everyday, every moment, each one of us is tempted to sin. A lot of temptations in

our lives. Temptations will never go away before we die. It is human reality. Jesus went to the desert to show us this human situation. But, we saw a victory over temptation.

Jesus shows us a good example of how we can be redeemed from sin and how we can overcome temptation. Jesus was tempted like us, and He overcame the temptations, not by His own human effort, but by the grace and strength which heavenly Father gave to Him. He succeeded because He trusted His Father would give Him the strength.

When you face temptation, follow the example of Jesus. Satan will say, "Kneel for a moment to me, then, the money, the fame, the business, the success, and the power will be yours." But, Jesus responded to the temptation with the simple but strong truth of God's word. No matter what happened, Jesus remained faithful to His Father. Do the same what Jesus did today and always. It is not easy, but don't worry God is here to take care of you, to help you.

As the Israelites followed Moses for their journey to the Promised Land, we must follow Jesus for our journey to the Resurrection. He will give us what we need to make a successful journey. Our Lord Jesus gives us His Spirit to help us in our weakness and to be our guide and consoler in temptation before we enter the great joy of Easter.

As Thomas Merton said, "Lent is not a season of punishment so much as one of healing in God's love."

Having entered the journey to the desert during the Lent for forty days, it is a time for us to review and purify our faith and life. After a successful journey, we will find God's real presence in our life with great joy of Easter.