

Lent – Our Forty Days in the Desert

“Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” But he answered, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’” Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour; and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! for it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’” Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.” -Matthew 4. 1-11

Lent, traditionally a time for fasting, almsgiving, and prayer, is also a time to take stock of our lives, to prepare ourselves physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually for the death and resurrection of Christ. For many Christians around the world, Lent is one of the most important times of the year. Unlike Advent which serves as a time of celebration and of great anticipation, Lent is more frequently a time of solemn observance and preparation for Easter. From its start on Ash Wednesday, this year on February the 17th, until its conclusion on Easter Sunday, we find ourselves, like Jesus, in the desert.

As Lent is the time for greater love, listen to Jesus’ thirst ... He knows your weakness. He wants only your love, wants only the chance to love you.” -St. Teresa of Calcutta

It is hard to imagine this barren wilderness as described in the gospel of Matthew as we remain shrouded in snow and cold. Yet, the imagery of the desert is still important; it helps us recall our need to stop and reflect; to prepare for the expected and unexpected events in our lives. Lent is an invitation for us to accompany him on that journey; the forty days that Christ Jesus prepared himself, body and soul, for his ministry on earth. Even in the midst of temptation, Jesus revealed to us what it means to live out one’s humanity; what it means to be in relationship with God.

Today, Christians around the world observe Lent in many ways. Some will still observe the fast strictly, beginning with the wearing of ashes on Ash Wednesday and abstinence of meat until Easter Sunday. Others will choose to give up something trivial for Lent. At the same time, many other Christians will use Lent to study their Bibles and pray more intently, making use of devotional books, and daily reflections. And even others will act generously as a way to place others first. In whatever way you recognize Lent and however you prepare for Easter, remember always to remain fixed on Christ; to follow him, mind, body, and soul, from the forty days and forty nights in the desert, to a life dedicated to serving God and serving others.

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