

February 26, 2012
First Sunday of Lent

The Spirit took Jesus out into the desert...MK 1:12

I live in the desert. Most recently I live here with my new roommate Buddy. He is yellow with a black splash on his back, big ears, brown eyes, and is rarin to go in his desert home.

Morning walks are fine except when we pass the "rabbit patch." The bunnies are wise to the environment and they know that all these dogs on leashes can't lay a paw on them. So much to the consternation of the many dogs on leashes, the rabbits just stay in place and stare down the dogs. It is dog-goned frustrating.

So in the mornings, the rabbit patch calls forth whining, leash pulling, and frustration from the passing dogs, but the rest of the walk goes pretty smoothly.

But last night was another story. From the moment Buddy and I approached the outer drive, his ears were up and he entered into a tugging match. There were other eyes out there in the dark and he sensed them. Whose eyes? Rabbits for sure. But there were many other possibilities: javalinas or even rattlers. And even in the daytime coyotes and foxes are sighted in the neighborhood. But the night hides them from human eyes, but not from a dog's detecting nose.

So out in the desert there can be serene and peaceful days. The human eyes survey mostly the beauty of saguaro cacti, and desert brush. But at night, the desert becomes a hustling and bustling place and sometimes a dangerous one.

So Mark tells us today quite simply and concisely: Jesus *"remained in the desert for forty days tempted by Satan. He was among wild beasts and angels ministered to him."*

And for us the followers of Jesus, each Lent we too must go out into the spiritual desert. And there too, we will encounter Satan, beasts, and angels! And most likely we will encounter them in our own personal darkness.

We all possess a shadow side, the hidden tendencies, some of them evil, which we find hard to acknowledge, but others notice and react to.

Lent provides an opportunity for us to gently explore this hidden side, and to "get real" with insight, sorrow, and repentance.

And sometimes we act like angels. Good for us!

And sometimes we act like beasts—our jaws snapping and our sharp teeth biting into others around us.

Jesus went out into the desert forty days and forty nights. Scripturally, 40 means a long time. Our Lent will be forty days and nights. Like Jesus, we are to make friends with our desert and with our darkness. Light will only fully return at Easter.

Making friends with our desert dark means gently weaving our way. It means acknowledging that we are not angels, nor will we ever be perfect. But we can heal. We can mend. We can change.

This always means letting go. We are in spring training now and if we can give up a few little things for Lent, then the big denials when needed will not seem so overpowering.

One of the letting go paths of Lent is alms giving. We must open our hearts and our hands and not hold on when we generously give alms. The opportunities for this spiritual exercise are all around us. The most obvious is the poor boxes in our churches and the outreach of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society.

NOW is the time for all of this.

NOW is the time to go into the desert.

NOW is our forty days for:

“The Kingdom of God is at hand!

Repent and believe in the Gospel!”

Breakfast Discussion: What is the best personal good that might result from Lent?

Personal Reflection: How can I make friends with my personal darkness, and acknowledge it without at the same time condemning my own weakness?

Lenten Resources:

Check the “Books” tab of this website and read the explanation of “*A Contemporary Way of the Cross.*” It can be ordered from Tau Publishers most quickly by calling: 602-625-6183 or from the Internet: Tau-Publishing.com

...Another of my books that would be a good Lenten read: *Spirituality In The Midst of Messiness*, also available from Tau-Publishing.