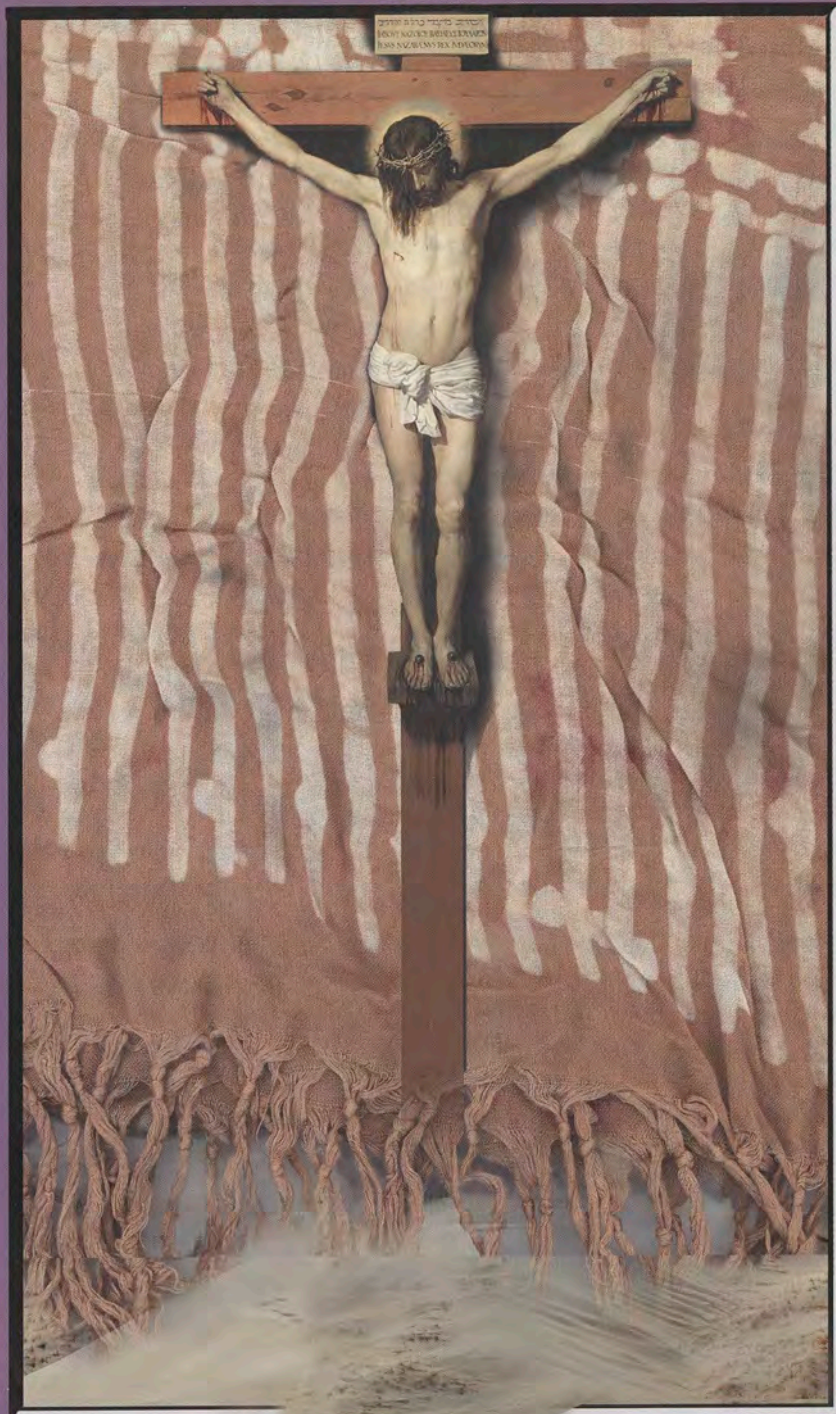


LENT





FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

Year C

Deuteronomy 26:4-10

Psalm 91:1-2, 10-11, 12-13, 14-15

Romans 10:8-13

Luke 4:1-13

Gathering

(A shallow, flat container, like a cookie sheet, covered with sand rests on a table covered with purple cloth. A standing crucifix is placed at the edge of the sand tray. Small flat stones, one for each member, are laid out in the sand tray in a pathway leading toward the crucifix. A small, unlit votive candle rests next to the crucifix.)

Lent is upon us. Each year at this time we have the opportunity to be *led into the desert by the Spirit* for forty days to test our conversion and to come to know our God more deeply. Last week we reflected on the experience of Simon Peter and his fishermen. They trusted Jesus to the point of leaving everything to follow him. What did you let go of this past week to follow Jesus more fully?

Prayer

(The candle is lit. Members are invited to be conscious that they are in God's presence. After a time of quiet, the leader draws attention to the stone pathway in the sand leading to the crucifix. He/She invites members to be in touch with the steps in life they have taken since last Lent and the steps

God invites them to take to the cross this Lent. A selection of instrumental music is then played. When the music is complete, the leader and several members lead the community in prayer as follows. To each invocation, members respond, “Lord, be with us and guide us through the desert.”)

- Leader: As we begin this Lenten season, O Lord, fill our hearts with hope and the power of your Holy Spirit. Increase our awareness of your presence in our lives, day by day, during our 40-day journey.
- I: Increase our awareness of the freedom offered by a life of simplicity. Help us to let go of things that burden our lives and our souls.
- II: Increase our awareness of your glorious creation. Help us to live gratefully and respectfully on our planet Earth.
- III: Increase our awareness of the power of quiet and stillness and the respite it provides from the noise and chaos of the world. Help us to discover you in the quiet.
- IV: Increase our awareness of the plight of the least of our sisters and brothers. Help us to be generous in our Lenten almsgiving.
- V: Increase our openness to your Spirit that we may discern your call in our life during these days of *desert time*.

HEARING THE LORD’S GOSPEL

(The scriptures are proclaimed aloud with a pause after each reading. Following a pause after the proclamation of the gospel, the leader invites members to name a word or phrase from the gospel that stays with them, but without any additional comment. Some may repeat what another has already said.)

When this naming is complete, the leader passes out copies of the scriptures of the week as needed. Pausing between them, the leader then poses these two questions: “What draws you to this gospel?” “Where do you resist this gospel?” The community pauses for a time of silent reflection. After

about a minute, the leader invites members to consider the Reflection and Questions for the week. After a time for silent reflection, the leader invites members to re-arrange themselves in groups of three or four for sharing. The small groups move off so as not to intrude on one another.)

Reflection

Deserts are arid, desolate and treacherous places, where staying alive can be a challenge. But there is mystery in the desert. Deserts are also places where unusual and exquisitely beautiful plant life is unexpectedly found, yellow bells, orange jubilee, prickly poppies, teddy-bear cholla.

Deserts are places that most of us do not ordinarily seek out intentionally. In Jesus' case, going into the desert was not on his initiative; it was an act of obedience. He was "led by the Spirit." This image of Jesus being drawn for 40 days into a place of unknowns and potential peril evokes the experiences of the Israelites wandering for 40 years in the desert. In the desert, both the Israelites and Jesus were tested. They needed to be reliant on the mercy and protection of the Father.

There are figurative deserts in our own life – places or times of pain, loneliness, uncertainty or fear – the loss of a child or parent, serious personal illness or the inability to find work. These desert experiences are times of emptiness – where we are tested and challenged to let God fill the void.

We can survive and even thrive in these desert experiences when we prayerfully let go and trust. On the other hand, in times of testing, we can also choose to be angry, fearful or revengeful, transmitting our pain to everyone around us. We don't ordinarily have to seek out *desert experiences* – they find us. We must trust that the Spirit will guide us through them. These experiences can be times of spiritual growth and transformation. They can be powerful opportunities to experience God's presence when we least expect to find him. It is in understanding this paradox that we begin to understand the wonder that is our God.

Lent calls us to enter willingly, deliberately, into a special desert time, a zone of emptying ourselves, so that we can encounter God more deeply. Do not just let the time pass; open yourself fully to Life in the desert this Lent.

Questions for Reflection and Conversation

When has a challenge been a growing experience? What did it take to

get through this challenge?

Where have you found new life in a time or place of emptiness?

What steps closer to the cross does God ask you to take this Lent?

If you are in the midst of a desert experience now, what needs to happen for it to become a transformative experience for you and/or others around you?

What do you plan to do to open yourself to God more fully this Lent?

HEARING THE GOSPEL'S LORD

(After about fifteen minutes of sharing in threes/fours, the leader re-gathers the community. Once back together, members pause for a moment. The leader then poses these questions: "What do you hear Christ saying to us in hearing and sharing his word?" "What do you want to hold on to for yourself from this session?" "How are you/we being called to live in response to God's word?" After a pause, the leader invites the community to a time of conversation. When this sharing is complete, the community moves to a time of prayer.)

Response in Action Suggestions

Simplify as you begin Lent. Go through your closet for clothing you have not worn in the past year. Prepare it to be donated to a shelter near you.

Set aside ten minutes of desert time each day this week. Clear your mind and heart and soul from clutter. Allow a sense of God's presence to fill the void you are intentionally creating.

Celebrate the sacrament of Reconciliation now at the beginning of Lent to open yourself more fully to the grace that Lent can offer you.

Prayer

(After a brief pause, the gospel or a portion of it, either of the other readings as appropriate or the responsorial psalm are proclaimed. The idea is to select a text that lends itself to inviting members to the time of silent prayer that follows. Following the proclamation, the leader poses these questions to the members: "What does Christ in his Spirit say to you now?" "What do you say to him in response?" The community pauses for a full five

minutes of prayerful attention to God. A brief instrumental selection may be played during part of this time. After this time of silence, the leader invites members simply to mention a word or two, or a brief expression that captures what they hear Christ saying to them personally. The community receives this without additional comment.

*Following this sharing, the song, “In These Days of Lenten Journey, is played. The song may be found on Utube.. When the song is complete, a member leads the community in prayer as follows. To each invocation, members respond, “**Be with me Lord and be my strength.**”)*

Member: As we each journey through our own desert experience during this Lenten time,

When I am tired or worn out at the end of a difficult day,

When I am fearful.

When I encounter a person in need or in a difficult situation,

As I struggle with decisions about what is the right thing to do.

As I strive to be faithful to you, O God,

(Members add other prayers of praise, thanksgiving or petition as they will. When the prayers are complete, members join hands and pray the Lord’s Prayer. The session concludes with the exchange of a sign of peace.

Each person takes a stone from the pathway in the sand to keep in their pocket as a reminder that they are on a forty-day journey.)