

One Body Initiative: Week 7 – The Desert Experience

March 26, 2021

Scripture: Matthew 4: 1-11 (NRSV)

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. ³

The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” ⁴ But he answered, “It is written,
‘One does not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶ 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.’”

⁷ Jesus said to him, “Again it is written,
‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; ⁹ and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! for it is written,
‘Worship the Lord your God,
and serve only him.’”

¹¹ Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and ministered to him.

Commentary

From *Biblia de Navarra: Edición Popular* (translated by Br. Pablo)

Before starting his messianic mission and proclaiming the Kingdom, the Lord prepares with prayer and fasting in the desert.

Jesus encounters temptation in the desert. This is a consoling passage for Christians, since it shows us that Christ was truly human and is sympathetic to our human condition.

The devil tempts Jesus in regards to the obedience he must have to the mission that God has entrusted to him. Jesus is victorious over the temptation, which announces his final victory after the Passion, which is the ultimate demonstration of his obedience to God.

The Church celebrates this mystery in a special way during Lent.

Questions for reflection:

- Share a time in your life or faith journey that you would describe as “going through the desert.” How did you experience the desert?
- What graces resulted from this desert experience?
- What do you think about the fact that early Christians decided to go and live in the desert in order to deepen their faith and relationship with God? What do you think the desert environment offered that they could not find elsewhere?
- What do you think about the way that the chapter of Matthew begins, “the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness”? How has the Spirit led you to a desert experience?

For further reflection:

From *The Desert Fathers: Sayings of the Early Christian Monks*, by Benedicta Ward

“Evagrius said, ‘A wandering mind is strengthened by reading, and prayer. Passion is dampened down by hunger and work and solitude. Anger is repressed by psalmody and long-suffering and mercy. But all these should be at the proper times and in due measure.’”

“Arsenius always used to say this, ‘Why, words, did I let you get out? I have often been sorry that I have spoken, never that I have been silent.’”

“Macarius said also, ‘If you are stirred to anger when you want to reprove someone, you are gratifying your own passions. Do not lose yourself in order to save another.’”

“Two hermits lived together for many years without a quarrel. One said to the other, ‘Let’s have a quarrel with each other.’ The other answered, ‘I don’t know how a quarrel happens.’ The first said, ‘Look here, I put a brick between us, and I say, That’s mine.’”

Then you say, No, it's mine. That is how you begin a quarrel.' So they put a brick between them, and one of them said, 'That's mine.' The other said, 'No; it's mine.' He answered, 'Yes, it's yours. Take it away.' They were unable to argue with each other."

"They did not talk, not because they hated conversation, but because they wanted to listen intently to the voice of God in silence; they did not dislike eating, but were feeding on the Word of God so that they did not have room for earthly food or time to bother with it; they did not avoid company because it bored them, but, as one of them said, 'I cannot be with you and with God.' It was not a dislike of sleep that made them keep vigil, but an eager and longing attitude of waiting for the coming of Christ:"