



1st Sunday in Lent

Jesus in the Desert
40 Days & 40 Nights

Lay Ministry Reflection by:
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Jesus was a very busy man teaching, mentoring and performing miracles. And yet, as busy as he was, he went out to the desert for 40 days of prayer. As important as Jesus' work was, it was more important to pray and enhance his relationship with God.

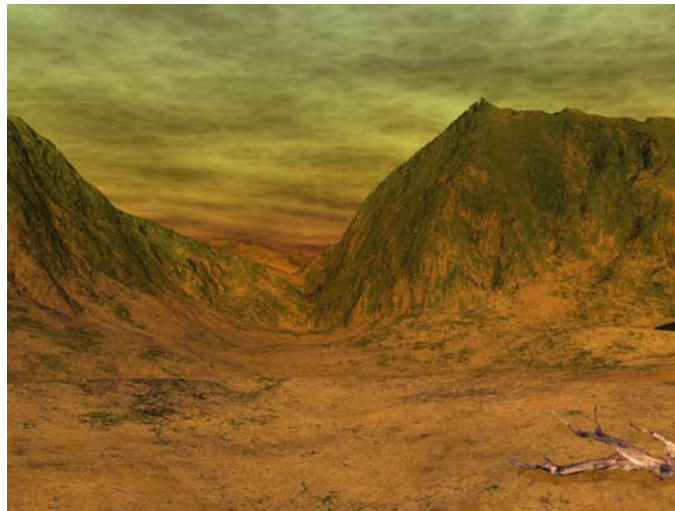


He stopped everything, not for a few minutes or an hour or even a day, but for 40 days. He knew he was called by God and had to prepare for his ministry. He took time to speak to God, to reflect and to listen. He also fasted and unburdened himself from the rituals of eating. His hunger was for his relationship with God. He grew strong to resist temptations from the devil and to endure the adversity that laid ahead for him.



When the devil tempted him to make bread and eat, he responded, "One lives not on bread alone but on every word that comes forth from the mouth of God" He carried the Jewish scriptures within and fed on them, but I think God also speaks through our prayers and his creations.

I'm a camper and scout leader. When I go camping I fill the car with everything I think I need or could possibly use, but Jesus went on what sounds to me like a survival hike with just the bare essentials, ...probably with just his sandals, clothes and water bottle. But he unburdened himself with all my so called essential supplies and just simply went. But why the desert? Jesus didn't pick the itinerary, Matthew says. The Spirit led him. The Spirit was his compass, a hiking essential. As a hiker this trek is very scary. I certainly wouldn't go hiking for 40 days with only a water bottle and a compass, even the very best compass.



We think of the desert as barren, but really it's a simpler, but harsher environment with plants and animals that can endure the adversities of the heat, cold and lack of water. They are strong and they are amazing survivors in very extreme conditions.



Maybe He looked around at God's work in the desert. After praying to God, maybe he listened and saw God's work there and began to know God through his creations, as we get to know an artist through his work. Maybe he saw how well the plants and animals adapted to adverse conditions and how strong they were because of them. Maybe that helped him see God's supreme wisdom and strength. Maybe he saw that adversity can make you stronger.

I know when I go out into nature, I am amazed at how large, beautiful and orderly everything is. All the plants, animals and types of landscapes are interconnected and dependent on each other. The environment determines the characteristics of everything within it. In physics, there is a law that order goes to disorder. Yet nature is highly complex and maintains order. I find myself absorbing that greatness, the strength and order. I return home with balance and the knowledge that God came home with me and stays with me and is larger and stronger than all my challenges. Maybe that's what happened to Jesus on a larger scale, where he gained strength and balance and the certainty that God was with him. When the tempter came and asked him to change his allegiance to him, Jesus was strong and rejected all of the attempts to forsake God. When the devil tried to create disorder from God's order, Jesus was strong enough to say "Get away!"



The most important thing to Jesus was spending time with God and nurturing that relationship. Why should I do less? I'm a doer. I'm always busy.

It is so easy to get caught up, even in the things I think God wants me to do, like my work at church, taking care of my family and helping young men in scouting become the best that they can be. But I'm not the best I can be if I don't slow down and take care of myself and my relationship to God.

Matthew 4 says "It is written, "The Lord, your God, shall you worship and him alone shall you serve."

So to worship God, I have to focus on God and not let even my work in God's name stand in my way. I don't think I have to go out in the desert and fast for the next 40 days, but I need to unburden my life and simplify my inner lists of things I think I need to do and put "spend time with God" on the top of the list.

Maybe this Lent you too can unburden yourself and instead of looking at lent as a time of sacrificing or giving up something or doing something more: you might look at Lent as a time to free yourself from resentments or insecurities or obligations or whatever keeps you from the most important thing of all; God. Maybe you can free yourself from some burdens and find time to pray and to listen to what God has to say to you.



Monica Rising is a member of the Saturday, 5 pm Choir.

She also is the Coordinator of the Holy Week Triduum Evening Services.