

Father Dave's Weekly Homily

02/26/12 1 Lent B

-- The desert wilderness area of Judea is a fascinating place. Sixteen years ago this month I spent a full day walking in it. Specifically, I was in the area east of Jerusalem on the way down to Jericho.

-- Now, I didn't encounter wild beasts there, though there are snakes and other animals around, especially in warmer weather. Nor did I encounter thieves, though the cracks and crevices in the rocks are great places for thieves to hide.

-- There are dangers, though. You don't want to be out there lost and alone. At some times of year, you risk dehydration; at other times, you can drown if there's a storm in Jerusalem or at one of the higher elevations. These cause sudden rushes of water down the canyons, and people have drowned as a result.

-- Jesus is driven into this wilderness with no human company for 40 days. On the one side of him are the demons tempting him. Mark does not elaborate on those demons, but they are ever-present. Jesus is subject to temptation.

-- On the other hand, we hear that angels minister to him. God gives him strength to fight temptation. Though he has no human company, he has God's abiding presence.

-- Lent is our own journey into the wilderness and desert areas. We encounter the wilderness of our souls. As we quiet ourselves and allow ourselves to experience God's presence, we quickly see the demons haunting us. We encounter our own sinfulness.

-- Oh, we can run away from this for a while, and there are many ways to distract ourselves from the truth of our sin. But we can't hide. The power of sinful inclinations makes itself known.

-- But it is not the final word. Like Jesus, we have our equivalent of angels ministering to us. The community of the Church is here to support us in our struggle against sin.

-- And we have the power of the sacraments. This weekend we send forth those who will receive the Easter sacraments to our Bishop in the Rite of Election. They are engaging in conversion of mind and heart and we pray for them in this process.

-- We ourselves have the power of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Penance). Penance helps us face up to our faults squarely, and to hear those assuring words of the priest *I absolve you of your sins*.

-- This is a great time to take advantage of this sacrament, especially if it's been a while since we've done so. We need not be afraid, for God's forgiveness is generous and the priest will assist you in the process.

-- The Eucharist gives us strength and nourishment to face up to temptations. It helps us to respond to God's call to serve our brothers and sisters in the ways in which we are able.

-- Jesus spent his time in the desert. We have the opportunity to use this Lenten season as a time of "retreat," so to speak. Most of us will not have the luxury of extended days of prayer and reflection.

-- But each of us can take some time—if only a few minutes each day—to put ourselves in the presence of God in prayer. And we can all take advantage of the grace of the sacraments this season.

-- If we do so, we will probably encounter wild beasts and demons in our soul. But we will also encounter the healing and saving power of God, which is greater than any demons we will face.