

02/22/15 1 Lent B

-- We sometimes hear of people who've had "desert experiences." They disappear for a while where they can't be reached. Usually, they are alone during that time. And they go there for various reasons.

-- The recent movie *Wild* tells the story of Cheryl Strayed. Cheryl was married very young. Her mother died of cancer when she was just 22, and here father was not in her life.

-- Soon after her mother's death her life started to fall apart. She was unfaithful to her husband with a good number of men. She started taking drugs, and ended up mainlining heroin. Within a couple of years, she and her husband divorced. She admitted it was mostly her fault.

-- The demons in her life were piling up. Soon after her divorce was finalized, she took on her own desert experience. She would hike the Pacific Crest Trail from the deserts of California to the Oregon/Washington border. It was an ordeal, but it also helped her face the demons in her own life.

-- Jesus was driven into the desert for his "desert experience." The demons he faced were not his own sins. Rather, they were temptations of his ministry. The gospel of Mark does not outline them in detail. It simply says he was tempted by Satan.

-- He faced those temptations down, the "wild beasts" that confronted him. The gospel also mentions that angels were ministering to him. Most likely they gave him strength when the harshness of the desert was getting to him, physically and spiritually.

-- It is a custom for many people in the Church to take a yearly retreat. Often, they will take a number of days in silence, as I did at the end of my sabbatical in the fall of 2013 at the Jesuit Retreat Center in Wales.

-- Silence can help us to face our demons, whether they be sinful habits, challenges in our work or family life, addictions of any type. Lent, at its best, is a type of retreat for our souls.

-- We may not have the luxury of getting away to a deserted area for total silence. But we can and should take out some time daily to be alone with the Lord to hear how he is calling us to change our lives.

-- It can be painful to face our demons, as it was for Cheryl Stayed out on the Pacific Crest Trail. Facing them honestly may force us to look at changing the way we do certain things. It may call us to weed out some long-standing habits, and that is not easy.

-- But, as Jesus did, we have angels ministering to us. God does not leave us alone in this ordeal. God watches over us. He sends us people with the wisdom to help us confront truth in our lives, whether that truth is comforting or disturbing.

-- Jesus was driven into the desert immediately after his baptism. By reason of our baptism we are driven to confront evil in our world, and even in the depths of our own person.

-- During Lent we should face our demons honestly. It is a good time to seek the forgiveness of God offered in the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Penance). For God does not leave us alone to face evil. He sends his angels of kindness, strength and forgiveness. He assures us that he will not leave us alone in our struggles.

-- May we take the opportunity to use this Lenten season for our own "desert experience." Whether we have the good fortune to get away, or can only steal a few minutes of silence each day for prayer and reflection, God will be with us to help us overcome the demons in our lives.