



LIVING THE GOSPEL



**First Sunday of Lent
February 18, 2024**

Theme: "The kingdom of God is at hand; Repent, and Believe in the gospel."

Gathering Prayer

All: Grant, almighty God, through the yearly observances of holy Lent, that we may grow in understanding of the riches hidden in Christ and by worthy conduct pursue their effects. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Exploring the Word

Gospel Reading: Mark 1:12-15

¹² The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³ And he was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to him. ¹⁴ Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, ¹⁵ and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel."

Gospel Focus

One of the Luminous Mysteries of the Rosary, introduced in 2002 by John Paul II, is Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God. It is a different mystery from most of the others—rather than commemorating one moment from the life of Jesus or Mary, it gives us the heart of his work, an ongoing process throughout his public life. This gospel perhaps gives us the one moment that best represents this mystery: Jesus emerges from his desert pilgrimage and starts proclaiming. That this is a Mystery of Light is telling: light is emerging here, scattering darkness before it and illuminating what was once unclear. It is also a moment of light in Jesus' life as he emerges from the darkness of his desert temptation and into the light of public life and work.

Gospel Reflection

In today's gospel, Jesus invites all to choose a change in lifestyle. It is not imposed, but failure to accept it will have disastrous consequences. "Repentance," *metanoia*, is a change of mind and heart, a lifelong process of transformation. Jesus is not asking for the temporary foregoing of something pleasurable, like giving up chocolate for Lent. The *metanoia* to which Jesus invites us is both a turning away from whatever inhibits the full flourishing of the divine intent for creation and a turning toward the source of divine

love. There is no better time to begin turning than now. Good intentions to make better lifestyle choices in the future become empty rhetoric in light of Jesus' urgent invitation. "This is the time," the *Kairos*. *Kairos* means the opportune time, the right time, as distinguished from *chronos* simple chronological time.

This crucial time is marked by the presence of two simultaneous forces, the divine Spirit who empower us to choose what is of God, and Satan, the adversary, pulling us in opposite direction. In the gospel, the Spirit drives Jesus into the desert, where choices are clearer. In biblical tradition, the desert symbolizes the place where two opposing forces meet. The desert can be a place of danger, where wild beasts dwell, or where revolutionaries hide out. It was a place of testing for Israel, where they turned on their leaders and murmured against God (Num 10:11-21:34). In prophetic tradition, the desert wondering became romanticized into a honeymoon time for Israel, where the people could be alone with their beloved God, with nothing to distract from the heart-to-heart sharing. So too, for Jesus, the Spirit is with him in the desert, but also the adversary—all those systems and forces that are opposed to God.

Unlike Matthew and Luke, Mark does not describe in detail the precise ways in which Jesus was tempted. What Mark emphasizes is that God's power is stronger than satanic forces. Using Greek verbs in the imperfect tense, which indicate ongoing action that began in the past, Mark says that the divine presence is always with Jesus, as angels "ministered to him" (*diekooun auto*). Mark's entire gospel is framed by this phrase. At the close of the gospel, Mary Magdalene and the other Galilean women who followed Jesus to Jerusalem and stood at the cross "ministered to him," *diekonoun auto* (Mark 15:41).

The good news that Jesus announces and embodies is that God's ministering comforting and empowering presence is at hand now, at this *Kairos* time, and at every moment, especially in times of crisis Jesus does not announce that God will rescue us from experiencing bleak times of trial, or frightening chaos, as with the out-of-control flood waters in the story of Noah. The good news is that God never abandons the beloved creation and all the living beings with whom the covenant has been made.

To accept this good news is to accept the invitation to change—to conform our manner of living to God's ways. To what change in lifestyle is the Spirit leading you this Lent?

Old/New Testament and CCC links

First Reading — Genesis 9:8-15

⁸ Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, ⁹ "Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your descendants after you, ¹⁰ and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. ¹¹ I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." ¹² And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: ¹³ I set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴ When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, ¹⁵ I will remember my covenant which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh.

Responsorial Psalm — Ps 25:4-5, 6-7, 8-9

R: Your ways, O Lord, are love and truth to those who keep your covenant.

Your ways, O Lord, make known to me; teach me your paths,

guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my savior. **(R)**

Remember that your compassion, O Lord, and your love are from of old.
In your kindness remember me, because of your goodness, O Lord. **(R)**

Good and upright is the Lord, thus he shows sinners the way.
He guides the humble to justice, and he teaches the humble his way. **(R)**

Second Reading — 1 Peter 3:18-22

¹⁸ For Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit; ¹⁹ in which he went and preached to the spirits in prison, ²⁰ who formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. ²¹ Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers subject to him.

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333. From the Incarnation to the Ascension, the life of the Word incarnate is surrounded by the adoration and service of angels. When God "brings the firstborn into the world, he says: 'Let all God's angels worship him.'"(Heb 1:6) Their song of praise at the birth of Christ has not ceased resounding in the Church's praise: "Glory to God in the highest!"(Lk 2:14) They protect Jesus in his infancy, serve him in the desert, strengthen him in his agony in the garden, when he could have been saved by them from the hands of his enemies as Israel had been.(Cf. Mt 1:20; 2:13,19; 4:11; 26:53; Mk 1:13; Lk 22:43; 2 Macc 10:29-30; 11:8) Again, it is the angels who "evangelize" by proclaiming the Good News of Christ's Incarnation and Resurrection.(Cf. Lk 2:8-14; Mk 16:5-7) They will be present at Christ's return, which they will announce, to serve at his judgement.(Cf. Acts 1:10-11; Mt 13:41; 24:31; Lk 12:8-9. The angels in the life of the Church)

538. The Gospels speak of a time of solitude for Jesus in the desert immediately after his baptism by John. Driven by the Spirit into the desert, Jesus remains there for forty days without eating; he lives among wild beasts, and angels minister to him.(Cf. Mk 1:12-13) At the end of this time Satan tempts him three times, seeking to compromise his filial attitude toward God. Jesus rebuffs these attacks, which recapitulate the temptations of Adam in Paradise and of Israel in the desert, and the devil leaves him "until an opportune time".(Lk 4:13)

541. "Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying: 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent, and believe in the gospel.'"(Mk 1:14-15) "To carry out the will of the Father Christ inaugurated the kingdom of heaven on earth."(LG 3) Now the Father's will is "to raise up men to share in his own divine life".(LG 2) He does this by gathering men around his Son Jesus Christ. This gathering is the Church, "on earth the seed and beginning of that kingdoms".(LG 5)

1423. It is called the *sacrament of conversion* because it makes sacramentally present Jesus' call to conversion, the first step in returning to the Father(Cf. Mk 1:15; Lk 15:18) from whom one has strayed by sin.

It is called the *sacrament of Penance*, since it consecrates the Christian sinner's personal and ecclesial steps of conversion, penance, and satisfaction.

1427. Jesus calls to conversion. This call is an essential part of the proclamation of the kingdom: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel." (Mk 1:15) In the Church's preaching this call is addressed first to those who do not yet know Christ and his Gospel. Also, Baptism is the principal place for the first and fundamental conversion. It is by faith in the Gospel and by Baptism (Cf. Acts 2:38) that one renounces evil and gains salvation, that is, the forgiveness of all sins and the gift of new life.

2612. In Jesus "the Kingdom of God is at hand." (Mk 1:15) He calls his hearers to conversion and faith, but also to *watchfulness*. In prayer the disciple keeps watch, attentive to Him Who Is and Him Who Comes, in memory of his first coming in the lowliness of the flesh, and in the hope of his second coming in glory. (Cf. Mk 13; Lk 21:34-36) In communion with their Master, the disciples' prayer is a battle; only by keeping watch in prayer can one avoid falling into temptation. (Cf. Lk 22:40, 46)

Sharing and Discussion

1. What does your baptism mean to you? How are you living out your baptismal promises?
2. Reflect on your faith journey- where you have been, where you are going, and on how God accompanies you as you go on? What changed your life to become more Christ centered?
3. Do you feel called to proclaim God's kingdom in your present phase of life?

Closing Prayer

All: Creator God, you sustained Jesus through his time of temptation in the desert. Sustain us through our prayers and acts of service, that we may be signs of your love to the world. We offer this prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Leader: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life.

All: Amen