**A week with the Lord Jesus in the Desert**

 ***The Spirit drives the Lord Jesus into the desert for forty days. He faces three temptations by the Devil. He is comforted by God’s Angels.*** (Mt 4: 1-11)



Dear Brothers and sisters in Christ,

On Saturday, 27 March 2020, Pope Francis presided over an extra-ordinary and exceptional event to implore God in front of the picture of the Perpetual Succour and the Miraculous Crucifix for an end of the Covid-19 pandemic. After that, in front of the Blessed Sacrament inside the front door of St. Peter Basilica, all different prayers for everyone were offered to God in a most trusting way to wake up the Mercy of God upon each human being and ask God to pour down a healing touch on the face of the earth. This wonderful and spiritual event culminated with the imparting of the **Urbi et Orbi** Blessing and the receiving a Plenary Indulgence.

In the homily after the passage of the Gospel of St. Mark 4: 35-41. Pope Francis started: *“When evening had come” (Mk 4:35). The Gospel passage we have just heard begins like this. For weeks now it has been evening. Thick darkness has gathered over our squares, our streets and our cities; it has taken over our lives, filling everything with a deafening silence and a distressing void, that stops everything as it passes by; we feel it in the air, we notice in people’s gestures, their glances give them away. We find ourselves afraid and lost.”*

Yes, in the middle of this crisis, we feel “afraid and lost” like the disciples in the passage of the Gospel: *“Teacher, do you not care if we perish?”* (v. 38). However, in order to strengthen the Faith of his disciples and open their mind of Hope, the Lord Jesus scolded them: *“Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?”*(v. 40). After these two questions, he ordered the storm to stop and the face of the sea came back to its calmness in the amazement of the disciples….

This morning, the 5th Sunday of Lent on 29 March2020, when I celebrated Mass with the Lord Jesus and with all invisible parishioners of St. Christopher’s and St. Augustine’s in the Church, the answer of Martha in the Gospel touched my heart: *“Yes, Lord! I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who was to come into the world.”* (Jn 11: 27). During this time of crisis, we use again the words of Martha to pray to the Lord Jesus that he extinguish the blazing fire of the Covid-19 from the face of the earth and we believe, through his power and mercy, this pandemic will be wiped away from the world soon.

Together with the faith of the disciples in the power of God, this week before the Holy Week, I would like to ask you not to be with the Lord Jesus in the boat amidst a stormy sea, but to enter into the desert to encounter God, to see ourselves more deeply and to re-discover our life with God and our brethren.

Our life, marked by worries and tiredness, busyness and tension, ambition and earthly attractions etc..., has made us at times forget God. If at any time we do remember Him, it is in a routine of prayers and songs.

Now, it’s time to leave behind everything and to enter the desert to meet with God in a most intimate way. Encountering Him, we’ll have time to talk to Him and share with Him, the secrets of our soul. God is Love. He has patient ears and an endless mercy. He listens and responds to our confidences and our inner-self.

Desert is a quiet place, a place of silence. There is no noise, nor scrambling for position and privileges. However, there are many dangers: snakes, scorpions and temptations... that ensnare us. In order to avoid such dangers, we try to be as close to God as possible. The desert is an ideal place where we can be close to God in a special and intimate way.

 Pray to God, because He can help us discover deeply our vocation and overcome the snares of the world.

Talk to God and we can feel that His Words in return are so soft and gentle, so sweet and peaceful. They have a divine power to change our mind and our soul.

 Listen to His voice and we can feel the strength of His Love.

Let us entrust ourselves wholeheartedly to God and we shall see that He leads us by His Providence, His Spirit and His Love.

 **“God speaks to the heart of him who keeps silence in order to listen”**

Fr. Peter Hoang

St. Christopher’s and St. Augustine’s Parish

Airport West and Keilor Park

**Monday Morning**

**Our Relationship with God**



**Reflecting on:**

**“Overcoming Temptation”**

**Readings:**

 Luke 4: 1-13

 **Other Readings:**

 Deuteronomy 26: 4-10; Psalm 91: 1-2, 10-15; Romans 10: 8-13

**1. Lectio:** Jesus on his divine mission is led by the Holy Spirit into the desert. He stays there for forty days and fasts the whole time. Forty is significant as a time of preparation in the Old Testament. It recalls Moses fasting forty days on Mount Sinai (Exodus 34: 28) and the Israelites spending forty years in the wilderness before entering the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 8: 2-3, 29: 5-6).

 We only hear about three specific temptations, but it is clear that this was not the only time Jesus was tempted: the Devil left him ‘for a while’ (verse 13).

 The Devil tempts Jesus to use his supernatural power to meet his own physical need. Jesus rejects this misuse of his power. He identifies with you and me. We need more than just physical food. The implication is clear that we also need ‘spiritual food’ from God.

 The Devil then offers to hand over power over the nations if Jesus will worship him. Jesus had indeed come to save people from the Devil’s control, but not this way.

 Lastly the Devil tempts Jesus to prove his divine nature by throwing himself off the temple so God will send his angels to rescue him.

 These three temptations illustrate the core of every temptation: the desire to push God aside, to regard him secondary and redundant, to rely solely on one’s own strength, and to put the world right without God.

 Jesus is not deceived by the Devil’s cunning deceptions even when he uses scripture itself to tempt him. Jesus rebuts every temptation with scripture, quoting successively from Deuteronomy 8:3, 6:13 and 6:16. Authentic interpretation of a portion of scripture must be consistent with the whole of scripture.

 For Jesus and for us, the essence of all temptation is to be offered an appealing alternative to God’s way of doing things rather than obeying him.

**2. Meditatio:**

 **\*** What helped Jesus reject these temptations? What lessons can we learn to help us overcome the temptations we face? Consider what ‘spiritual food’ will help us stay close to God.

 **\*** Jesus was single-minded about doing things God’s way. He avoided being deceived into doing anything else. How can we try to follow his example?

 **\*** Consider this verse from Hebrew 4: 15. What encouragement does it offer us?

*“Our High Priest is not one who cannot feel sympathy for our weaknesses. On the contrary, we have a High Priest who was tempted in every way that we are, but did not sin.”*

**3. Oratio:**

The Lord’s prayer “Matthew 6: 9-13) reminds us to pray about temptation. Throughout the week, ask God to deliver you from the things that tempt you.

 Use the word from Psalm 91 to inspire your prayers today.

**4. Contemplatio:**

Spend sometime treasuring the promises in Romans 10: 9-11:

*“If you confess that Jesus is Lord and believe that God raised him from death, you will be saved.”* (verse 9)

 *“Whoever believes in him will not be disappointed.”* (verse 11)

**Prayer of the Day**

Lord Jesus,

 One thing I know for sure is that you love me.

 Because of that love you obeyed God the Father

 to come down to the world to be with me,

 to live as a human-being like me

 and to be tempted as a human-being.

 You wanted to be tested,

 and no worldly power could overcome you.

 You wanted to let me know

 that your love is pure.

 I wish to return your love by loving you with all my heart.

 I ask you to help me to overcome sins

 and resist all kinds of temptations

 that work against your love and holiness.

 and have courage to say, *“Away with you, Satan!”*

 every time I am being tempted by the devil. Amen.

**Monday Afternoon**

 **Reflecting on:**

**“Right Priorities”**

**Readings:**

 Luke 6: 17, 20-26

 **Other Readings:**

 Jeremiah 17: 5-8; Psalm 1: 1-4, 6; 1Corinthians 15: 12, 16-20

**1. Lectio:** Both Matthew and Luke’s Gospels record an account of Jesus’ ethical teaching. There are quite a few differences between the two reports. Matthew gives Jesus’ teaching on ‘real happiness’ in nine statements – the Beatitudes (Matt 5: 3-12)

 Luke uses the technique of contrast to emphasize the points and reduces the number of different situations that Jesus says bring blessing from nine to four.

 Now to the heart of Jesus teaching: Jesus teaches that the four situations of poverty, hunger, weeping and rejection because of him become sources of blessing. Jesus gives a completely new perspective on life and offers hope and comfort to everyone in these circumstances. Our human nature is to try and avoid these things but Jesus warns that it is their opposites – wealth, gluttony, gloating and a ‘good’ reputation – that can be our ruin.

 Perhaps the truth is written so clearly we can’t see it. These four times of difficulty can bring us into total dependence on God where our focus is completely on him. But in times of plenty it is much too easy to see ourselves and our possessions as the source of our happiness instead of pleasing God. Jesus knows otherwise and wants us to grasp the fact that God himself is our only our only guarantee of happiness and security.

**2. Meditation:**

**\*** What do you think about Jesus’ teaching in these verses? What strikes you most?

**\*** Consider Matthew 6: 33 *‘... be concerned above everything else with the kingdom of God and what he requires of you...’* How can we ensure that, whatever our circumstances, our top priority is always serving God and doing what he tells us to do.

**\*** Think about the image of a tree planted by water in Jeremiah 17 and Psalm 1. In what way are you putting your roots down deep into God?

**3. Oratio:**

Pray the words in Psalm 40: 4, *“Happy are those who trust the Lord...”*. Ask the Holy Spirit to gently reveal any areas of your life where you need to trust God more or change your priorities.

To build up your own trust try keeping a prayer notebook. Jot down your prayer each day. And then take a few minutes each week to add a comment beside each prayer as you see them answered.

**4. Contemplatio:**

Consider the example we have in Jesus. He single-mindedly listened to his Father and followed his plan.

Think about some of the ways God demonstrated his faithfulness to people in the Bible. Now think about the times God has been faithful to you personally.

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