

February 18, 2018 – 1st Sunday of Lent

I feel a little off, I got out of the shower and I looked at the clock and it said 4:30 a.m., instead of 5:30 a.m. I'm sitting there thinking what am I going to do with an hour, so of course, I went and prayed.

Announcements: Pictures will be taken on the north side of the building; there will be furniture and balloons and all kinds of stuff. This is to help the youth group raise funds to help pay for their subscription to the youth program.

Today starts the annual Catholic Appeal, for 2018. In the bulletin are envelopes, if you've never given and would like to consider giving. If you gave last year, they will send you an envelope in the mail, so you don't have to worry about these. It's interesting that they finally have taken the date off these envelopes so we can use them year after year now. Won't have to worry about extra printing costs. Also, in the bulletin, I'll probably post it on the door later, our bulletin has gotten so large now. I promised you that I would have three days during Lent, during the morning, that I would have confessions. For those of you that don't drive at night or are uncomfortable driving at night, like me. February 28th, March 7th, and March 12th; I will be here in the morning at 10:00 to noon if there's nobody here. If there's people here, I'll continue to hear confessions as long as people are here. Those are the three days in the bulletin and it will be on-line and hopefully, I'll post it on the door, if I remember.

There was a married couple, married twenty-five years. From all externals it looked like they were a wonderful married couple. He was a good provider, she was a good homemaker, they went to church every Sunday, they knelt down by their bed and prayed every night. But, what people didn't see was, every time they had a discussion it ended in an argument. Finally, after twenty-five years, the wife told the husband, "Look, it's the first Sunday of Lent, I can't take this anymore, so for this Lent let's pray that God takes one of us home, and then I'll go and visit my sister."

The first Sunday of Lent, every year, there is a gospel of Jesus in the desert being tempted. Matthew and Luke give us these nice stories with lots of detail, but Mark doesn't. He puts a whole bunch of stuff and packs it in there, and it's really, his gospel is like the Reader's Digest version of the gospel. That's the same thing we're seeing today because this is the year of Mark. Mark says very succinctly, "The spirit drove Jesus into the desert." Jesus was God and Man. Jesus' Man, needed to be able to focus on the mission of the Father. And so, here he is driven into the desert. Now when people think of deserts in the United States today, they think of people in air-conditioning, and in Arizona going around playing golf all year long, and not having any trouble. Prior to air-conditioning and irrigation, this desert was not a nice place. Everything in the desert normally, will hurt you or kill you. People don't realize that we still have spots in this state where that is the truth. Our legislature every year, wants to pass a, "stupid hiker law," to get those people who went out hiking up a mountain, in the middle of the summer, without water or the right cloths on, like flip-flops. Every year it's defeated because, you know, "it's not their fault, they don't know." Just like when we had the World Youth Day in Colorado, in the high desert. My friends in the seminary were ordered by their bishop, "You will go on World Youth Day." So, they were from Illinois, and the humidity is there during the day and during the night so the heat stays all day long. They didn't know that when you come out to the desert, that it's hot during the day and cold at night. They didn't bring blankets and they didn't bring their coats or jackets. All of these teenagers from Illinois, were huddled together trying to stay warm at night and they didn't get any sleep. My friend, who's now Father Thieryoung in Illinois, he called me, over that summer, he said. "Did you know that the desert gets cold at night?" I'm here and in Chandler and all that and yah, I know that. "We didn't know that!"

Well, that's what you call "research" before you travel. The desert is not a very hospitable place. Symbolically, the desert is where you go to focus more on God. Physically, there's no water, there's hardly any food unless you want lizards and cactus. You start having to get rid of things in your life and then you will only focus on God.

Spiritually, the same thing. A "desert experience" the Church relates, is one in which we put aside our worldly things. We put aside people in our lives. Today if you go on a retreat, no cell phones, no iPads, no computers; people are shaken, withdrawal symptoms, because they don't know what to do. It's an experience, slowly you begin to focus on God and who God is and your relationship with God. You begin to realize, "Man, I need God, I really need God." Jesus, the man part, was sent to focus on the mission, to get him more in touch with His Father. He remained in the desert for forty days. Some people in our church history, Saint Francis and a couple others, were able to spend forty days and nights in prayer with water and maybe just a little bread in the morning. They were able to survive. Now does it mean everybody was in the desert for forty days? No, forty in the Bible is completeness, wholeness, totality. So, Jesus was in the desert long enough to have the mission complete. He had the unification with God and then it was time for Him to leave. And, He was tempted by Satan. Everything we do is tempted by Satan. If you go on a retreat or you have a desert experience and you get closer to God, what happens next? You come back to your life and Satan hits you hard, tempts you. It's, "Oh my gosh, I almost wish I didn't go on the retreat." Tempted by Satan. Even in today we say, "You know what? I'm going to get up ten or fifteen minutes early (not an hour like this morning) and pray." Satan's going to hit you. "Oh no no, just hit the snooze alarm." "Oh, these blankets are so warm, why do you want to get up?" All these different temptations. Jesus went out to be united with God and Satan says, "No, I'm going to tempt Him." He overcame that temptation. Then it says, "He was among wild beasts." Wild beasts represent nature, the natural world. The temptations of the natural world. The things we can get caught up in, in the natural world; sex, drugs, alcohol, just some of the things that count as wild beasts, symbolically in the desert. Out there, it was the real thing for Jesus. In our lives, the wild beasts are the things that tempt us and draw us away from God. It's getting too attached to the natural world, the things of nature which we consider, like materialism. All these kinds of "ism's". We get too attached to our possessions, the things of this world, and that way we forget about God. And, "The angels ministered to Him." He was never alone. We are never alone. If we're having a desert experience, we're down in the dumps, we're crying, or whatever because we're having a bad day; no one will understand, etc. etc. God is there with the angels. We have a guardian angel, we're never alone.

Jesus was never alone, but, here's the reason Saint Mark puts those two things in one sentence. We are natural and supernatural. The rest of the world; animals, insects, plants, rocks, those are natural. Those are material things, they don't have the divine part. They don't have an immortal soul. When we get too attached to those, then we start living a dysfunctional life. Part of us is not being taken care of, part of us is not being recognized, part of us is being ignored. We are also spiritual, and so, we are both – and. Saint Paul says, "We are a little while lower than the angels." But, upon glorification after we die, we are higher than the angels. We are both body and spirit in heaven. Angels are always spirits, they have no bodies. They have bodies when God wants them to have bodies for their message, but after that, they turn into spirit again. We are the only created things, the only created beings, that have body and soul, natural and supernatural. So, when you go into the desert, you are unifying those two. You're once again remembering who and what you are. So, Jesus was remembering who and what He was; supernatural and natural, divine and human, divine and mortal. We have to do that. We look at history

and we see pagan empires, like the Roman empire before Christianity. What was the number one cause of death? It was suicide. Because, if you don't admit that you are part divine, and minister to that, then you start having mental illness. You start having depression, you start having psychosis. All of a sudden it doesn't matter anymore because you've ignored that side of you, the supernatural. You are like, "Ah, eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow I die." And when I've exhausted all that, it's not worth living. "I'll kill myself." We are seeing that, in our pagan country today. Yes, a lot of us are still saying and believing "in God we trust," but most people don't say that and mean it, if they say it. Our country is becoming pagan and so what's becoming the number one cause of death? Suicide. Suicide among teens, suicide among the military, suicide among police officers. I haven't seen statistics but there used to be a tremendous rate of suicide among dentists because people were always talking bad about them. They always had to look down in our mouths. The number one cause of death if you put it together is suicide. People don't realize that there is a divine part and that because of the divine part, there is always "hope." Hope, because we have another place that we're going, another place that we need to be. It's not just our will be done, but God's will be done. The first Sunday of Lent it says, "Remember, you are human and divine." We just heard in Ash Wednesday, "You are dust and to dust you shall return." That's reminding you that there's another part of you. Then on the first Sunday of Lent, they say, now; natural – supernatural, human – divine. It is during Lent, we are called to look through all our four lives, our total life. Do I really need to work harder on pushing aside the material natural things, and becoming closer to the spiritual side and God?

God bless you.