



LENTEN
PROGRAM
Year B

New Paths of Hope

Prepared by

Faculty of Catholic Theological College, Melbourne

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We can justly consider that the future of humanity lies in the hands of those who are strong enough to provide coming generations with reasons for living and hoping.

– Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 31

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

MARK 1:12-15

The Spirit drove Jesus out into the wilderness and he remained there for forty days, and was tempted by Satan. He was with the wild beasts, and the angels looked after him.

After John had been arrested, Jesus went into Galilee. There he proclaimed the Good News from God. 'The time has come,' he said, 'and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the Good News.'

See also:

GENESIS 9:8-15

1 PETER 3:18-22

For Christians, the season of Lent commences in a stark and confronting way. On Ash Wednesday, we smear our foreheads with ash, the symbol of death, as we look towards the joy, new life and transformation of Easter Sunday. We begin with a symbol of death that sacramentally takes us to new life. We stand with Jesus in the starkness of the wilderness, stripped of life's creature comforts, facing temptation and confronting forces of darkness. But Jesus is not alone; we are told that he was 'driven' into the wilderness by the Spirit, that same Spirit that descended upon him like a dove when he was baptised in the Jordan by John.

When we hear about Baptism and the waters of the Jordan, we anticipate the waters of Baptism at the Easter Vigil that celebrate the triumph of Jesus over the forces of darkness, despair and temptation. The significance of the Baptism of Jesus will be celebrated when new members of our parish communities will receive the gift of faith for they too are chosen by God and filled with the gift of the Holy Spirit. Water and Baptism remember and celebrate the God who gave his people new life through his covenant when the waters of death and destruction became the waters of hope and new life, as today's first reading from Genesis indicates.

Let us enter the wilderness experience with courage and determination, but without fear. The Spirit is with us, and we walk this Lenten journey together with Christians around the world. We are guided by the Word and seek that freedom that only comes from the Cross, from sacrifice and from the reality of death, 'dying to self', in order to be transformed by grace and Gospel hope on Easter Sunday.

As he begins his ministry, Jesus proclaims that the kingdom of God is near and so we are called to repent and hear the Lenten call of conversion and *metanoia*; new ways of acting, new ways of thinking, a purification of our lives and relationships with each other. The starkness of the wilderness experience calls us, not so much to 'give up' things for Lent, but to do with less, to free our lives from unnecessary clutter and useless objects.

In Australia, we are blessed with the long tradition of Project Compassion that calls us not simply to make a financial donation to the work of Caritas but to remember that a generous contribution is a profound act of solidarity with the poor and the marginalised. Giving sets us free.

Let us walk this journey listening to the Word that calls us to conversion, attentive to the gift of the Spirit that sets us free, and longing for that radiant light of Easter Sunday when the risen Lord triumphs over sin and death.

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT



Loving God, as we begin this season of Lent, walk with us as a people of faith. Guide us by your Word and fill us with the gift of the Holy Spirit that renews the face of our fragile and broken world. As we contemplate the Cross and death of your Son, lift our eyes towards the joy and hope of Easter Sunday. Guide our hearts and set us free to be people of the Good News.

Amen.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Genesis reminds us that God makes a covenant with his people and gives us signs of his presence and grace in our lives. What signs do you perceive of God's grace and presence in your life?
2. What practical ways can help you enter into the wilderness experience of prayer and reflection this Lenten season?
3. The paschal mystery of Jesus renews our lives and sets us free. What freedoms do you long for in your life?
4. Following his baptism in the waters of the Jordan, Jesus commenced his public ministry. How do you reflect on your sense of mission as a disciple of Jesus this Lenten season?