

## Sermon – Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> March 2019 – First Sunday in Lent

“Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus was led by the spirit through the wilderness”.

It is by the Holy Spirit that Christ is led into the desert for 40 days and 40 nights and so it must be for us. As the Holy Spirit leads Christ, so He wants to lead, show and introduce us to the desert. It is that place in where we come to know who we truly are and how we are to be before God. This is not an idle invitation but is crucial. It is only through the desert that we can find true happiness and joy. Such a statement may seem somewhat extravagant, for how can one find joy in a place where there are no distractions, luxuries or things to entertain us? On this last Wednesday we started the celebration of Lent, as we did so, we received on our foreheads ashes with the words “remember you are dust and unto dust you will return”. Seemingly these are stark words particularly if we have let the world, its seductions and blandishments fill our lives.

Lent if it is to be real is about stripping ourselves so that we can be filled with the life of God and his abundant graces. That prospect means joy, happiness and peace which suggests that the words of Ash Wednesday for the imposition of ashes are not stark but joyful. The world and its many temptations wants to give us its “happiness” and contentment and compromise with the truth. However, if we are serious about the Christian endeavour, that simply won’t wash. This time may not be comfortable as we pine for chocolate and alcoholic drink or our stomachs are constantly rumbling. All that is saying to us most seriously but also joyfully I want to be filled with the life of God. If Lent is stark and bleak then we do not truly know or want to meet the joy and life of Christ.

Our Lenten endeavour happens when as the Gospel told us on Ash Wednesday that we are to go to our private room, close the door and be alone with Our Father in Heaven who is in that secret place. In other words the endeavour is about becoming a people of prayer.

So how can we go to pray? What does it mean to set aside time for prayer? Very simply as that Gospel of last Wednesday said, it is to that place that we are alone and private. It is there, perhaps our room, sitting quietly on the bus, walking along the street or perhaps enjoying some quiet in the park that we can be quiet and meet God. It is that time that we shut off all our distractions be it social media, obsession with the busyness of the world or wanting always to be in contact with people. Put simply it requires our generosity for we have to forsake ourselves and any kind of self-pity and go to the Lord in love. In truth it is a love affair. God wants to show his love for us and we are invited in prayer to go to Him. As we do so let us hear the Our Father in our heart and let that be the DNA of our prayer. Remember how it was that Jesus when he wanted to teach his disciples how to pray he gave them those words, if we live these words and pray them, then we need to be in the desert or in our private room. In today’s Gospel Jesus in the desert was to be found at prayer as he overcame temptation and gave us the way in which we can find true happiness and joy.

In the Our Father we pray “hallowed be thy name” which is the call to praise God. In the desert Christ says to Satan “you must worship the Lord your God and serve Him alone”, which is a reiteration of the call always to worship Almighty God. In our prayer we are invited to acknowledge, to praise and to adore the Lord. That desire to serve Him is the wish to put Him at the centre.

In the Our Father we pray “let your will be done” which is us saying to Satan “I do not trust you”. At the heart of prayer is the call to recognise the will of God and to live our life according to that. We are invited to follow God’s will which sometimes will be challenging and may cause suffering but we believe that He will provide. The will of Satan is always about compromise, pleasing ourselves and subtly denying the existence of God. Jesus says in the Gospel today, “you must not put the Lord your God to the test” and what he is saying by that is that we must remain faithful and loving towards God.

Thirdly we pray in the Our Father, “give us today our daily bread”, which is reiterated when Christ says to Satan “man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from God”. We pray in the Our Father for the bread of life and of the Eucharist that which will sustain and nurture us. What we are praying for is the knowledge and the wisdom of God which we can simply call the Word of God. Our understanding and wisdom about life can only come from God, not from the lies of Satan.

In these days the Holy Spirit wants to lead us into the desert to pray where we are invited to praise God, ask that His Will may be done and for us to receive in abundance his wisdom and truth. Let us be ready in this most beautiful and joyful of seasons to pray.

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**Please be with us for St Patrick’s Day**

Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> March – second Sunday of Lent – Holy Mass at 11am and 5pm – shamrock will be distributed at both Masses with the 17<sup>th</sup> being a Sunday this year, we celebrate the solemnity of St Patrick on the Monday.

Monday 18<sup>th</sup> March – St Patrick’s Day – Holy Mass at 8am, 12.45pm and 6pm. The Principal Celebrant at the 6pm Mass will be Bishop Paul McAleenan. Shamrock will be blessed and distributed at all Masses.