**Readings for February 18, 2024 – First Sunday of Lent**

Fastened to the Spirit

*In the course of our lives, we are all “led into the desert by the Spirit,” and we must struggle with the “wild beasts,” (our demons and challenges). Fortunately, we have the example of Jesus’ life to follow, and the presence of the Holy Spirit to guide us. We are not alone in our desert times.****\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_***

**Opening Prayer:** Dear Lord, as we gather today, help us to remember your covenant, your promise to be a God who is with us always. …help us to pay attention and be more aware of your active presence moving throughout all our days. Teach us your ways as we study your Word together, and help us hear what you want to say to each of us. Amen.

Reading I [**Gn 9:8-15**](https://bible.usccb.org/bible/genesis/9?8)

God said to Noah and to his sons with him:   
“See, I am now establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you   
and with every living creature that was with you:   
all the birds, and the various tame and wild animals   
that were with you and came out of the ark. I will establish my covenant with you,   
that never again shall all bodily creatures be destroyed by the waters of a flood;   
there shall not be another flood to devastate the earth.”  
God added: “This is the sign that I am giving for all ages to come,   
of the covenant between me and you and every living creature with you:   
I set my bow in the clouds to serve as a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.  
When I bring clouds over the earth, and the bow appears in the clouds,   
I will recall the covenant I have made between me and you and all living beings,   
so that the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all mortal beings.”

Responsorial Psalm [**Ps 25:4-5, 6-7, 8-9**](https://bible.usccb.org/bible/psalms/25?4)

**R. (cf. 10) 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. Your ways, O Lord, are love and truth to those who keep your covenant.**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. Your ways, O Lord, are love and truth to those who keep your covenant.**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. Your ways, O Lord, are love and truth to those who keep your covenant.**

Reading II [**1 Pt 3:18-22**](https://bible.usccb.org/bible/1peter/3?18)

Beloved: Christ suffered for sins once,   
the righteous for the sake of the unrighteous, that he might lead you to God.  
Put to death in the flesh, he was brought to life in the Spirit.  
In it he also went to preach to the spirits in prison, who had once been disobedient   
while God patiently waited in the days of Noah during the building of the ark,   
in which a few persons, eight in all, were saved through water.  
This prefigured baptism, which saves you now.  
It is not a removal of dirt from the body but an appeal to God for a clear conscience,   
through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven  
and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers subject to him.

Gospel [**Mk 1:12-15**](https://bible.usccb.org/bible/mark/1?12)

The Spirit drove Jesus out into the desert,   
and he remained in the desert for forty days, tempted by Satan.  
He was among wild beasts, and the angels ministered to him. After John had been arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God:  
“This is the time of fulfillment.  
The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.”

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Related Reflections

Lent is a time of retreat. We journey inwardly to the desert places of solitude and silence to rediscover God’s unique and abiding love for us. This love strengthens us for our mission in the world.

Before beginning his public ministry, Jesus is driven into the wilderness by the Spirit to fast and pray. He is about to undertake his mission and must prepare by putting all other things aside. His sojourn in the desert is a time of serious, focused prayer. Like Jesus, we too, are impelled by the Spirit to get down to the basics during Lent. We must be attentive to the Spirit’s promptings to put aside all the nonessentials in our lives and make a specific commitment to prayer this Lent.

The wild beasts of our fears and sinfulness may cause us anxiety as we stand before God in prayer, but the angels of hope and trust come there to minister to us.

Unlike Matthew and Luke, Marks says nothing about the content of the temptations that Jesus faced in the desert. Nor does Mark say that the temptations ended, but only that Satan left Jesus to await another opportunity. In fact, throughout Mark’s Gospel, Satan continues to test Jesus, all the way to the cross. Yet Jesus perseveres. His time in the wilderness strengthens him for all that lies ahead. This gives us hope, for the Christian, too, must wrestle with demons not only once, but repeatedly during life’s journey. – From Prayer Time, Cycle B, Renew International Press

This week, we see that Jesus, fresh from the mountaintop experience of his baptism, is now led by the Spirit into the wilderness. After a famishing forty days, Satan comes to tempt him. He comes not with chocolates or a second glass of wine or any such temptations. Instead, he pushes into Jesus’ identity.

The voice from heaven has recently proclaimed Jesus as God’s beloved son; will Jesus trust that word? Is an identity that flows from the Father enough, or will Jesus give in and strike out on his own? Adam and Eve failed a similar test, desiring to be gods instead of trusting God, with disastrous consequences. We, too, seek to be gods of our own realities. It works out no better for us than for those in the garden long ago.

But Jesus trusts God. Jesus takes God at God’s word. For Jesus, Sonship is more than enough. In his victory over evil, we become children of God, too. As we enter into Lent, let us set aside our need to be like God. We already have a God, one in whom we can place our trust.

* Reflection from Grace Lutheran Church, Pastor Dave Lyle

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The story of Noah is the story of a society gone wrong. The flood was a collective event, a response to the collective evil of the time. Collective also was the covenant made by God with the survivors of the flood, and collective was the redemption by Christ, a just man for the sake of the unjust.

The challenge to reform our lives and change our lives expresses a call to change ourselves individually and to change ourselves as a society. The good news spoken of in the Gospel is the announcement of the kingdom, a world where God rules.

Jesus’s victory over Satan represents a victory over the powers of evil, those forces that cause us to sin. The evil we struggle against in Lent is personal as well as social.

* Gerald Darring – From St. Louis University - https://liturgy.slu.edu

**(Also from Gerald Darring):**

**Demons:** Jesus went into the wilderness and struggled with the demons. Such is the metaphor of spiritual life presented to us in today’s Gospel. In the course of our lives, we are all “led into the desert by the Spirit,” and we must struggle with the demons.  
  
We struggle with the demon of self-sufficiency. Ignoring our interdependence, we imagine that we can “go it alone,” and end up dividing ourselves into isolated units of races, classes, and genders, living as though we do not need the other (or God).

We struggle with the demon of power. We begin by setting ourselves above others, and often end with oppressing them, using our power in a cruel or unjust manner to keep others down.  
  
We struggle with the demon of pride, imagining ourselves to be better than others, or the ‘top dog’ in our little world, or number one in the world. Lent is a time to struggle with the demons, “to rid ourselves of the hidden corruption of evil.”

 “Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.”

**Believing in the Good News:**

Question: Why is it so difficult to repent and believe in the Gospel – that we are loved by God and are called to embody that love in the time and space of earthly life?

Answer: Because we harbor so many other beliefs that do not fit into this good news.

Beatrice Butreau names some of these beliefs: “Health and beauty, money and power are necessary for happiness.” “My welfare is more important than yours.” “The world is here for us to exploit.” “They hurt me so I must get even.”

Of course, we are not always aware we hold these beliefs or other beliefs [the wild beasts] that block us from embracing the good news. We often discover our own beliefs by tracing our actions back to their source. We shrug at injustice because “some people get the shaft and some don’t.” We read about a tragedy befalling someone and respond, “thank God it’s not me.” … Our instinctive and repetitive responses reveal our hidden beliefs.

Repentance entails finding and letting go of beliefs that compete with or contradict the Good News … This means identifying ourselves more and more as beloved sons and daughters of God sent into the world to bring love onto the earth. Our faith in Jesus will gradually change to faith *with* Jesus…

Repenting and believing in the good news is not just a project for Lent. It is the adventure that permeates all of life. We never finish letting go of false beliefs, and we never finish entering the Kingdom of God, embracing and embodying the transcendent love at the center of our being.

* John Shea, *The Spiritual Wisdom of the Gospels* (Liturgical Press)

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*“The desert, scripture assures us, is the place where God is specially near.”*

*(Fr. Ronald Rolheiser)*

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“If you feel like you are in a desert in your life, consider this wisdom from Abba Moses, one of the Desert Fathers: ‘Sit in thy cell and thy cell will teach thee all.”

Note; The Desert Fathers were early Christian monks, hermits and ascetics who lived in the Scetes desert of Egypt in the Third Century.

* Karen Beattie, *A Book of Grace-Filled Days 2018*, Loyola Press

Discussion Questions

Compare Noah with Christ: Noah brings people out of the flood into a new creation; Christ to a new life or transformative experience through the waters of baptism. Talk more about this idea of the flood “prefiguring” baptism (second reading).

In what ways does God continue to “bring to life” our world (God’s creation), and each of us?

Talk a little about the concept of “covenant” that we see in the first reading, and the image of “God patiently waiting” in the second reading.

How does this fit with our Lenten theme of fastening our souls to God?

In what ways might we try to be like gods, as Pastor Dave Lyle suggests in his reflection? How does knowing who we are and to whom we belong help us resist this impulse “to strike out on our own?” (You may want to look at the “Turn to Me” hymn as you think about this – to whom are we fastened?).

Name a few other false beliefs (the wild beasts, or demons) that keep us from living out our faith as Jesus intended. (See Gerald Darring’s reflection).

**Closing Prayer**

God of the covenant, just as your Spirit sent Jesus into the wilderness, so you have sent us, your people, into the desert of Lent. Doubtful and fearful we come, often confused by the clamor of lesser voices. Yet we long for the simplicity and strength of a life fastened and centered in you, O God, source of our joy and peace. Help us to enter the desert of Lent, and leaving all else aside, let us rest in you alone. Amen.

**Also:**

Jesus, our merciful and forgiving savior, give us the courage to resist the things that tempt us in this world – the things that keep us in the desert and away from you. Let us remember to fast not just from food, but from judgmental thoughts and unkind behaviors that don’t align with your teachings to us. Give us clarity and strength each day, so that we might be empowered to go out and minister to others in your name. Amen.

*“Oh Lord, I pray, fasten my soul to you.”*

Something to pray with this week

*Write down a temptation that you would like to ask Jesus for help with. Pray for the grace to be able to give this struggle to Jesus, and to trust that he can provide healing and peace.*

*Am I open to allowing the Holy Spirit to lead me into my desert places – those times when I can pray and be quiet – those times when I can reflect on my life and truly be changed this Lent?*

*Reflect again on this line from the first reflection (from Prayer Time):*

***“The wild beasts of our fears and sinfulness may cause us anxiety as we stand before God in prayer, but the angels of hope and trust come there to minister to us.”***

*What are some feelings that come up for me when I ponder this thought? (St. Ignatius calls this paying attention to our “interior movements”).*

*Turn To Me*

Turn to me, O turn, and be saved,  
says the Lord, for I am God  
there is no other, none beside me.  
I call your name.

Lift up your eyes to the heavens,  
and look at the earth down below.  
The heavens will vanish like smoke,  
and the earth will wear out like a garment.

Turn to me, O turn, and be saved,  
says the Lord, for I am God  
there is no other, none beside me.  
I call your name.

Composed by John Foley, S.J.

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