

Our Gospel reading for this morning picks up right after Jesus has been baptised in the Jordan River. It is the beginning of His ministry. And as you will all know, Jesus was in the desert where He fasted for forty days. We are told that Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. Have you ever wondered why he went? Was it because He trusted the Spirit? Was it because He knew God would never leave Him; never forsake Him?

Most of us would never intentionally head into a situation where we knew we were going to face trials, difficulties and testing. In fact we would avoid it. Yet, in the season of Lent we are actually encouraged to intentionally embrace a somewhat similar situation. Lent started this past Wednesday, which was Ash Wednesday and lasts until Easter Sunday—it's 40 days (excluding Sundays).

Many people have some idea that Lent is about giving things up, but they may not know much more than that. The word "Lent" comes from an Old English word that means "spring season." So Lent is actually a spring clean on our spiritual lives. It is, quite simply, a time to focus on how we can be better followers of Jesus, a time of repentance.

If you were to ask people today, many give up something like chocolate for Lent. But it's not about giving up something for the sake of misery itself. Because misery is not something which God desires. Instead, we might choose to give up things that currently take us away from time with Jesus. So what things in life take you away from your time with Jesus?

Through our Lent, we are reminded of our need to fully rely on God, and not on things. How therefore can you use this Lent as a time to not just think about giving up things, but rather about taking on things that bring you closer to God?

No matter what we do or do not do for Lent, we can only make it work if we, like Jesus are "filled with the Holy Spirit" and "led by the Holy Spirit." Each and every day as I walk into different pastoral situations I regularly will call upon God's Spirit to direct my words and guide me. Jesus knew as he faced difficult times he had to be led by the Holy Spirit. What ways today do you call upon God's Spirit to lead you?

And so led there, Jesus is left in the desert.

The devil tempts Jesus over and over again to do things which are focused on Himself, rather than on His mission to give His life as a ransom for many. He is tempted to feed Himself and give up His fast, to have all the worldly power and pleasures at His fingertips and to be a miracle-worker/a kind of superman for His own selfish benefits.

For Jesus to have said "Yes" to the temptations would have meant He would have said "No" to God, and "No" to the way of God's Kingdom. In doing so He would have also been saying "No" to loving humanity, and ultimately "No" to His death and Resurrection—which are the only hope for humankind—for you and me.

In other words, without Jesus' obedience we truly would be left alone—forever. But Jesus says "No" to Satan and "yes" to the Spirit. He knows his reliance must be on the Spirit and not on his own flesh. The amazing thing for me here is that if today we have a honest relationship and trust in God in our daily lives, then we have access to the same Holy Spirit that Jesus did.

Too often when I meet with people in the parish who are having tough times, they will say that they have had an inner strength that they can only equate to the Holy Spirit. Perhaps this is how Paul is able to proclaim in 2 Corinthians 12:10: “when I am weak, then I am strong.” So today, do you, like Jesus rely on the Holy Spirit to give you the strength for the trials of the day?

Our reading finishes by telling us that Jesus overcame the devil in the wilderness.

The next verse, which we didn't read this morning, says that “Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside.” Not only was Jesus filled with the Holy Spirit before He entered the wilderness, not only did Jesus rely on the Holy Spirit during His time of testing but He also left the wilderness “in the power of the Holy Spirit,” spreading the love of God to all who would have it.

The Good News of the Gospel is that through our dependency on God's Holy Spirit to guide us, on his strength, we too can be equipped for the road ahead filled with his power. And through it we are a carrier, a witness, of that strength to everyone else around us. Even when we are experiencing times of testing and being led to places of hunger and despair, God is with us. Even when it seems that all is lost and that the despair that only comes from Satan is about to get us—God is with us.

May this Lent be a period not just of giving up, but of taking on of the Holy Spirit's power into our trials. May we be led by him, may you more fully rely on him, and may you know his equipping for whatever life throws at you.