

## HOMILY – 1<sup>ST</sup> SUNDAY OF LENT – (B)

Most of the time when we hear the word “Lent” we think it’s time to give something up, such as giving up candy, ice cream, deserts, the news programs, social media, the infamous “procrastination.”

Sometimes we may think of adding something to our schedules, such as going to Mass during the week, saying extra prayers, serving at a soup kitchen, helping at a shelter, being friendly to everyone including the ones who think and act differently from you. Lent can mean all those things and maybe you should do some of those things, but it is important to take the season as a reflection time and be active about your spiritual development.

You are all baptized. You are filled with the Spirit. You have all you need to make yourself a better person. Last Wednesday, those of you who had the opportunity to attend Ash Wednesday Services may have heard the words “repent and believe the Good News.” Those are action words, not dreams or something for the future. Repent means to turn around, turn from where you are headed, or turn a corner and

head on into greater development of life in the Spirit. Repent can mean that we put our faith into action and move beyond the concept of the verbal acceptance of the teaching of Jesus. To turn around reflects the integration of the whole life of the person in faith that expresses itself in gratitude to God for his salvific acts throughout time.

In Mark's gospel today we hear about Jesus in the wilderness, put to the test by Satan and he was with the wild beasts. If you remember the first reading from Genesis God gave Noah and his sons a covenant with every living creature, all the birds, and the various tame and wild animals that were with him in the ark.

Somehow the covenant is forgotten and Jesus is exposed to the wild beasts, somehow a threat to his life is intended in Mark's comment. Could Mark be referring to his public ministry when all sorts of wild beasts clawed at him – the Pharisees, the demons, Herod, Pilate, the social evils of his day? Could be.

We come to our forty days knowing the beasts are out there.

Various addictions: alcohol, drugs, anger, negative attitude, and

some pandemic ones: refusing to wear masks (not our parishioners, of course), denying the validity of the vaccines, Passive/aggressive behavior?

Racism and exclusion certainly are beasts clawing at us and the whole world. Homilies and lectures about justice and faith can appear to be beast-like in their presentations (not this one, of course) and we discover our courage is weak and faith is even weaker and we wonder if we ever will make it through this wilderness of ours. We all may have seen the real beasts this past week with carelessness about vaccines and computer glitches. This pandemic has “masked” the other beasts still roaming the planet such as job loss, poverty, injustice, lack of “fair trade agreements”, lack of humane immigration reform, improper recycling of waste, lack of care for the sea and land and so on.

I think what you and I need to do is use these forty days to make ourselves better people, to see differently. Make ourselves turn around and believe the good news. In Scripture it says that when God created

the earth, the sun, all creatures on the earth, he saw that they were **good**.

So we are born good and our job is to move towards being **better** and then when our earthly journey is done, God will come to take us home and we will be at our **best**.

The good news is that the wild beasts in our wilderness are not the final word. Just as Christ's death on the cross was not the final word, the beasts in our lives and in our world are not the final word. The good news is that Jesus lives and the Spirit of God dwells in our hearts. Turn yourself around and believe it. Know also that the journey and the turning around is done by our own will and by strength in unity, in community with one another. It takes the power of God, the love of Jesus and the strength of the whole community to assist us on the journey. Look at Mark's gospel again...there are not just wild beasts in the wilderness with Jesus, angels waited on him. We have more than angels here. We have the Risen Lord feeding us, nourishing us, pushing us to believe: to believe in yourself and to believe in God. With God we will make it through our wilderness. Spend these forty days in prayer,

reflection and develop your spiritual lives. In prayer now, not just reciting words or outward observance but prayer from the heart continuous through your days and nights. St. John Chrysostom who guided the church as bishop back centuries ago, encouraged the community to paint their houses (meaning their souls) with the colors of modesty and humility. Make them radiant with the light of justice. Decorate them with the finest gold leaf of good deeds. Adorn them with the walls and stones of faith and generosity. Crown them with the pinnacle of prayer. In this way, you will make your souls perfect dwelling places for the Lord.

Going back to the image Mark gives us of angels waiting on Jesus, and as you are now in the desert of Lent, let Jesus wait on you.

Repent and believe the Good News.