

**Companions on the Journey**

**February 21, 2021**

**Dear Friends,**

The gospel for this Sunday from Saint Mark begins with the words: “The Spirit drove Jesus into the desert, and he remained in the desert for forty days, tempted by Satan.” Why is Jesus tempted by Satan? Because that is what Satan does. And why shouldn’t Jesus, who is God’s Word made flesh, be immune to such temptations? Isn’t he sinless? Can Satan actually, really, tempt Jesus? The answer is “Yes” he can. If Jesus is truly human, if he is truly like us in all things but sin then Jesus is susceptible to temptation because you and I, as human beings, are susceptible to temptation.

But the passage also says that the Spirit leads Jesus into the desert and it almost sounds as if the Spirit is doing this on purpose as if he is leading Jesus right into the trap set by Satan. The Spirit most definitely is leading Jesus into the wilderness. Jesus has come to restore the People of God, to create Israel anew after their many years of failure and infidelity. Jesus is creating the new beginning of Israel. And Israel was the people who were tempted in the desert not for forty days but for forty years. Finally, this people was led into the Promised Land by Joshua. It is the renewed fulfillment of the promise that the Lord had made to their father Abraham six hundred years before.

So Jesus, in the power of God’s Holy Spirit, is led into the very same wilderness from which the people of Israel came at the time of Moses. The time of Jesus is some twelve hundred years later. But the same dynamics are still at work. There will always be temptations. Once sin entered into the world and contaminated all creation there will always be temptations. There were temptations to sin before there ever was sin. There will surely be temptations once sin was given life. So Jesus must face down the demons that are coming after him. But Jesus is a Big Fish and the demons send their most powerful, Satan, to bring him down.

It doesn’t work. Not then. And not at the very end of his life. For that is when Satan will return to tempt Jesus when he is at his most vulnerable and at his weakest strength-wise. As he hangs in such abject pain the enemy taunts him: “If you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God (which Satan knows he is), come down off that cross and we will believe.” In other words, prove yourself to us. If you prove yourself to us, if you dance to the tune we play, then we will believe in you. Do you think that he who walked on the stormy waters of the Sea of Galilee could not have come down from that cross? How difficult is it to stay there when you know you have the power within you to come down from the cross? No. Jesus is tempted to take the easy way, the self-serving way, and save himself. But Jesus resists the temptation. And that is his message. We are to resist the temptations that come to us in life and we are to remain steadfast in faith.

The second part of the message is related. You absolutely can resist any and every temptation that comes your way (with the help of my grace). And I expect you to do so. I will help you to do so. Lent is the time for us to renew our inner spiritual convictions about what we are and are not doing in this life. And to make the necessary changes with the help of God’s grace. Let us begin.

**In the Peace of Christ,**

**Msgr. McHenry**