

Luke 4:1-13  
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Feb. 21, 2010  
Homily 146 Desert Temptation 1st Lent  
Deu 26:4-10 Roman 10:8-13

*He brought us out of Egypt with his strong hand and outstretched arm... with signs and wonders... he gave us this land flowing with milk and honey.*

This is sand Sunday, the desert experience. Can you remember the last time you were in the sand without your shoes on? Can you feel it? Warm and comforting; sand between our toes. Perhaps you are pretending you are in the desert with the warm sun clear air, and wonderful silence so that you can hear yourself think. It doesn't make any difference where sand is, a beach on a lake, a beach on the ocean, the Arizona desert, a sandbox in the back yard. Actually, that ruins the image of what we are trying to establish.

I am not trying to be a travel agent or travel planner here, but then again let's imagine that I am. "Hello, Devil Experience Desert Travel, Saint Thomas speaking", OK, I will humble myself, "trying to be a Saint Thomas speaking." OK, how about "trying to be good Thomas speaking or trying not to sin Thomas speaking". You pick which you are trying to be. "Yes, how may I help you today?", "I would like to take a trip to the desert to discover who I am".

It's about time! We have been wondering when you would be ready to make the trip. "Well, I might not be ready!" you say. Well, you better hurry up according to God's clock and the endlessness of eternity. You don't have much time left to find out the meaning to you life, to find out whom you really are. "Well, anyway you called on the right day, we have a special desert trip leaving immediately at a special price. Just think you get 40 days in the desert and the only cost is you time. God has covered the cost but you need to leave today". "Is it an all inclusive trip?" you ask. "Yes, it includes everything you need". "Then there is a resort and pool and spa and golf and food?" You ask. "No, I am sorry you must be confused. This is go-to-the-desert-to-discover-the-meaning-to-your-life, but it does include three amazing temptations to sell you soul to the devil by the devil himself". (Silence) "Hello, Hello?...are you there? I was going to say that you don't need to worry the Holy Spirit will pack enough grace so that you can resist the temptations."

Oh well, it is just a story right? That is the theme of today's reading. The first reading from Deuteronomy 26:4, some would say is the most important passage of the Old Testament. The Exodus to the Promised Land; 40 years in the desert finding themselves, enduring everything to achieve the Promised Land. Then, there is the Gospel of Luke, Jesus' exodus to the desert to discover the future course of his ministry and reflect on what he is called to do to lead each of us to the promised land, desert experience to desert experience, 40 years to 40 days, lent into the desert as we enter the first week of lent.

This brings us all to the big question, the desert question: What do you know about yourself today that you did not know a year ago? (Long Pause). Well, for the sake of this liturgy your time is up. I did not ask what you accomplished this past year. I did

not ask if your life is better than it was last year. I did not ask what you have acquired of earth possessions or where have you traveled to Arizona. I asked, what you discovered like Jesus about your self, what have you discovered about your life, what have you discovered about the meaning to your life. These are the big questions. This is not about what you are giving up for lent, be it pop or television or being angry or being envious. As we reflect, it might not be what we are giving up, but rather what we are willing to do, what we are willing to do to get closer to the meaning of our life. Jesus said no to the devil to discover his mission. Lent is about saying no to something so that we can discover ourselves. It is about spending 40 days on ourselves. Lent is a gift to ourselves as we prepare for the promised land, 'the land flowing with milk and honey', eternal life brought to us by the cross and resurrection of Christ at Easter. For many of us other than packing the Catholic Churches on ash Wednesday and giving something up, we fail at the opportunity of lent as we arrive on Good Friday with the achievement that we did not eat ice cream or go to a movie for 40 days. More importantly the big question is, will we put enough distance between ourselves and our ceaseless activity to hear ourselves think, to hear Christ speaking to us, to hear about who we are, and what our life is about.

*Paul wrote to the Philippians "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, be reminded, if in any thing that God reveals us to ourselves through our relationship with Jesus Christ. (Phil. 3:14).*

What do we do as a result of these scripture today? First, if we have not already made a resolution, we sacrifice something in our lives that creates space and time, so that we can discover ourselves, so that at the end of these 40 days we know something about ourselves we do not know today. Second, we set aside time to reflect with questions, as I have said before, big question, questions about life, like "Today, Oh Lord, help me to understand what my life means or what am I to do today that serves my life well". That means serving him. Third, learn as Jesus did in the desert to hear him when he speaks to you. Listen He is speaking now:

*Stand still. You have all the time in the world. I am here with you every moment. Do not let the world overwhelm you. It is not worth it. When you hold the ultimate objective of life in your mind and heart, things get simple and life gets easier. The ultimate objective, the higher the call, the simpler the truth, and the more clarity you will find. The higher call is a relationship with me, not with your career. Our relationship is and always will be the ultimate call. There is nothing wrong with being busy. Paul was busy, Aquinas was busy, Augustine was busy, John Paul was busy, but their activity was focused on their relationship with me You spend so much time doing stuff. Put the stuff in the closet and get it out of sight. Trust me. It will feel good. Keep me in view. Only then, will you discover the desires I have placed in your heart. You will recognize them by the way I disclose them to you. When you knock, I will open. Bring it all to me. Bring me your questions, bring me your frustrations, bring me your anger, bring me your failings and I will show you love, I will show you forgiveness; I will show you true joy. The answers to who you are to be and what you are to do will be obvious, but you must remain still. Be*

*still. Stand still. Bounce will happen where I am with you. I call it intercepts. I will intercept you. I gave you free will so that you could seek me on your own. It is more meaningful. You chose me, because you love me more than you love the things of this world. Remember, we are no longer worried about how you will get by. This is not an exercise in optimism it is an exercise in confidence in me. Get out of the boat.*

*He brought us out of Egypt with his strong hand and outstretched arm...with signs and wonders...he gave us this land flowing with milk and honey.*