



*“I Will Lead Her Into the Desert  
and Speak to Her Heart”*

As you know, February is “National Heart Month.” This is an effort to remind people to take good care of their hearts by getting check-ups, eating properly, and getting exercise. Good advise!

We use the word “heart” in our language to express something that is basic and universal, understood by its very use in conversation. Some examples: “wear your heart on your sleeve,” “have a change of heart,” “take it to heart,” “you’re a bleeding heart,” etc. All of that suggests that the HEART is central to our lives.

The Hebrew word for heart is LEVAV or LEV, for short. To the Hebrews, the heart was more than an organ in the body; it was the center of all parts of human existence: emotions, thoughts, choices, wisdom, intelligence. If we imagine the heart and its functions in this way, “heart month” could be a time of examining our own hearts. What better time to do this than during the season of Lent, which begins on Ash Wednesday, February 18? What better time than Lent to get a “spiritual heart” check-up?

Lent is another “heart” experience. The prophet Hosea says, “I will lure her into the desert and speak tenderly to her heart.” Lent, then, is a time for listening to the tender words that God speaks to our hearts. Hosea tells us that this will happen in the desert, a place of **silence, stillness, and aloneness**. It is a place where hearts can be healed, relationships restored, and things put right with God. In short, Lent is a heart-full period of prayer, fasting and charity, all of which can bring our hearts into alignment with God’s own heart.

The journey of Lent begins with the ritual of ashes. I can almost hear the prophets of old pleading with us, God’s people, to turn away from sin and toward God. May this Lenten season fill your heart with an abundance of God’s graces as you follow Jesus into the desert of “heart health.”