

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

1st Sunday of Lent | For Sunday, February 21, 2021

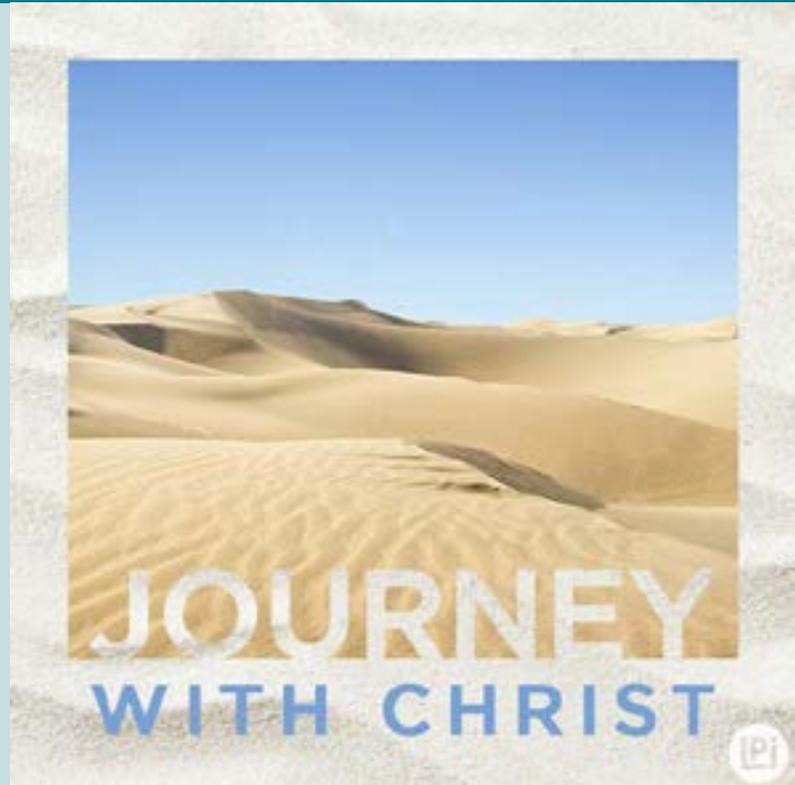
Adjust to Scarcity

Written by Fr. Mark Suslenko

Genesis 9:8-15

1 Peter 3:18-22

Mark 1:12-15



[Antoine de Saint-Exupery](#) wrote, "I have always loved the desert. One sits down on a desert sand dune, sees nothing, hears nothing. Yet through the silence something throbs, and gleams..." Deserts are difficult places in which to survive. The conditions found in a desert are quite unlike what most of us know as normal. But the desert has always been seen as a place of spiritual enlightenment, where human beings have profound awakenings and encounters with the Divine. Rich wisdom from the experiences of our desert fathers and mothers are at the foundation of our Christian spiritual tradition. Wonderful surprises and soul learning can be found in the desert silence, which isn't really silent at all. It's simply an environment free of distraction and excessive stimulation where one can begin to listen more deeply and keenly to what is going on.

Lent invites us into the desert. As the Spirit drove Jesus into the desert, so that same Spirit drives us into that same place of peace filled scarcity. We live a simpler, more reflective life for forty days hoping to confront some of the demons that bind us to our weakness and imperfections. They weigh us down with their burdens and make life much heavier than it really needs to be. Freely choosing to limit our distractions, obsessions, illusions, dependencies, securities, and familiarities for forty days opens the door to greater self-awareness and freedom. Preparing a suitable desert place requires some brutal honesty with ourselves and a willingness and desire to grow and change.

It's easy to give up the chocolate, coffee, or wine for a time, but without some real soul searching, reflection, prayer, and perseverance what really changes at the end of these forty days? We learn little if we simply resume business as usual. The success of our Lenten desert journey will come to light when we acknowledge that God is making good on his promises without reservation. If we do not believe that God is real and actively involved with us on a personal level, then Lent will have little value. God's covenant has to mean something to us.

Whether we realize it, we struggle with two gods. One is real and the other is not. Our world and the life we create for ourselves can easily become our “god,” requiring our daily allegiance. We can find that we get tired worshipping this god we have created and literally “sell our soul” as it demands. We even willingly sacrifice principles and morals. We run after this god as if on an endless treadmill, never quite catching up or getting where we think we need to be. Exhausted from all of the effort, we have little energy left to do much else.

The real God, however, is the God who created and fashioned us out of love and made a timeless covenant with us. He will be our God and we will be his people. It is this God whom we find in the desert and the very presence that “throbs and gleams” in the silence. It is when we are able to peel away all of the superficialities and unnecessary business of life that we learn to live with more scarcity and discover what is really needed for happiness.

The desert brings us to courage and strength. It is easy to become apathetic amid the world’s uncertainties and struggles. The flame of God’s presence can lead us from the land of “why bother” to the land of hope and surprises. The desert teaches us what really matters, lessons like those we have learned during this time of pandemic. We begin to rely more on the inner strength that comes from God rather than the minimal and passing comfort provided by created things. Transformed by the desert winds and challenges, we can become more credible witnesses not of what the world can do for us, but what God can do and is doing!

Getting to this point requires that we deal with an extremely important question. Are we willing to repent of any behaviors, attitudes, ideologies, agendas, or short-sighted opinions that directly oppose God’s Will? [Jean-Pierre de Caussade](#) in “[The Joy of Full Surrender](#),” says that, “Nothing is essential, real, or of any value unless it is ordained by God, who adapts all things and makes them suitable to the soul. Aside from God’s will, everything is hollow, empty, and vacant: there is nothing but falsehood, vanity, nothingness, shallowness, the letter of the law, death. The will of God is the salvation, health, and life of both body and soul, no matter what may be its ways of reaching us ... It is the will of God, given in and through these things, that effectively works to renew the image of Jesus Christ deep within our hearts ... God’s will is everything that is good and true in all things.”

Repenting of the falsehoods and empty pursuits will produce within us the fruit of a holy Lent. The god of the world comes with many falsehoods, distractions, hollow promises, distorted ideologies, and things that compromise humanity. We need to separate from all of that and discover the truth. Jesus came out of the desert proclaiming the Gospel of God. How will we come out of our desert experience? What

may change? What is known for certain is that God has not abandoned us or given up on all that he made. It is quite the contrary. God always starts new and fresh and desires nothing more than for us to love him. There is no better way to show that love than to choose the real God over the false one. God is paving the way for a new plan for humanity. Making that vision real will require that we become less of an image of ourselves and more of an image of Jesus Christ. Having met God in the desert, his presence will throb within us and our presence will reflect the glorious light of Christ!

Let us pray for a holy Lent. Our world is depending upon it and so is God.

Fr. Mark Suslenko

PRAYER

My Lord God,
I have no idea where I am going.
I do not see the road ahead of me.
I cannot know for certain where it will end.
Nor do I really know myself,
and that I think I am following your will
does not mean I am actually doing so.
But I believe the desire to please you does in fact please you.
And I hope I have that desire in all I am doing.
I hope I will never do anything apart from that desire.
And I know if I do this you will lead me by the right road
though I may know nothing about it.
I will trust you always
though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.
I will not fear, for you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

(Thomas Merton)