

## Homily. 1st Sunday in Lent. Year. B. 17/18 February 2024.

My main focus in Lent this year is prayer. The Pope has asked us to concentrate on praying for 12 months as we get ourselves ready for the Church Jubilee Year in 2025. Prayer was also one of the seven pillars put to us by Archbishop Mark Coleridge last year and you said at our Parish Assembly that you wanted to hear more about prayer and praying, so here we are.

Prayer is how we get closer to God and know God better. Drawing closer to God in prayer also leads us to know ourselves better. This is because we have come from God, are sustained in existence by Gods and are on a journey through life back to God. That's what prayer does. Our Lenten Season is a 6 week happy, serious and solemn but not sad journey, that offers us grace to be renewed in the Christ-life. Prayer, praying and living prayerfully is an indispensable part of our Lenten journey. It's the way we can open ourselves up more to the many gifts that God is offering.

After his Baptism in the Jordan River which marked a time a significant change in Jesus life and future direction, we were told that he was driven by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness where he remained for 40 days. St. Mark says that this was a time for Jesus of temptation by Satan. He was surrounded by the wild beasts and God's Angels looked after him. What's being described to us is a deep and serious time of prayer, a discernment time for Jesus, a long period of aloneness with Gods and himself. It was a challenging, even dangerous time, as he came to grips with who he was and with what God wanted for him and of him. Thankfully, the Angelic

messengers of God stood by to assist and guide him as he came to accept God's will with all of the changes and sacrifices this entailed.

The Holy Spirit was behind Jesus prayer time, his discerning retreat in the silent, risky wilderness of both place and of his soul. The Holy Spirit is the first source we must look towards and call upon when we set ourselves to pray. This is because praying leads us into the presence of the Almighty where nothing can be hidden or avoided, exposed as we are to the piercing light of God. This can be scary, a time of wild beasts and of raw passions as our faults are acknowledged, our needs exposed and our fears faced. We have to keep alert for the angels who come to care for us, to be found in the wisdom of the scriptures, the sacraments and community of the Church, the help of our friends and the insight trusted Spiritual guides.

St. Mark says that Jesus passed through his time of prayer and Satanic temptation emerging fully aligned to God's will. Getting ourselves aligned and in tune with God's will for us is the best outcome of our praying. He then left Nazareth, his mother and extended family and friends behind, a life altering decision, setting out on his public mission to preach the arrival of God's reign. His life of sacrificial service had officially commenced. If our prayer has been genuine it always leads us to service, to seeking the betterment of others, because this is what God is all about, the loving salvation of us and of the whole world.

This 1st Lenten Sunday lays out for us our way to pray and the meaning of praying, this being the renewal and deepening of our new identity and living each day in the baptismal life in Christ whose Spirit has made a

home within us. By his word and example, in this Eucharist celebration and in our parish community of faith as we welcome Jesus Christ and recall his praying, may our desire to pray as he did be enlivened, our prayerfulness be deepened and our welcome of God's gifts be widened.