

1st Sunday of Lent 21/02/2021

- **Opening Prayer**

May these weeks leading up to the tragedy of Good Friday and the glory of Easter Sunday remind us of who you are, how you love us, and who you have created us to be as your followers. May we walk through this season intentionally, removing distractions that take our gaze away from your glory. May we quiet the noise that pulls us from adoration of you and puts our attention on lesser things. May we simplify where we have been stressed, may we surrender what has been burdensome, may we repent of what has been sinful, Lord Jesus.

In Mark's short account of the Temptation, he bridged the ministry of John to the ministry of Jesus. The bridge consisted of a test and a proclamation. Jesus was tested for the Kingdom. And he was found worthy to proclaim the Kingdom. God's Spirit drove the Son into the desert so the war could begin. In the lore of Judaism, the desert was the place to find oneself before God and others. The people of God found an identity in the Exodus. David found his followers (i.e., his family) in the desert. Elijah heard the Lord's message in the desert. Indeed, the drawing card for John the Baptist was the desert experience. The desert was not a place of escape, but a place of discovery. The desert dweller found him or herself facing "their own demons."

"The desert is that place in Scripture where we go to figure out who is who and what is real. It is the place where souls are revealed. There, Jesus meets Satan and so do we, for this is not Jesus' story alone. This is our story too, for Jesus carries the fullness of humanity into his divine appointment with the Tempter. This is a confrontation with the powers and principalities that have colonized the imaginations of the world. We are not dealing here with merely personal temptations of the flesh or the pride of life... Jesus is naming the economic, religious, and political realities that claim godlike powers for themselves. He meets with Satan to contend about things of ultimate significance."

-Kris Rocke and Joel Van Dyke, Geography of Grace

- **Mark 1: 12-15**

The spirit drove Jesus out into the wilderness, and he remained there for forty days, and was tempted by Satan. He was with the wild beasts, and the angels looked after him. After John had been arrested, Jesus went into Galilee. There he proclaimed the Good News from God. 'The time has come' he said 'and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the Good News.'

- **We pause and contemplate our temptations and God's loving presence in our weaknesses.**
- **We pray for our families, communities and world, holding all our needs in our hearts before God our Father.**
- **We pray for each other in the trust we will be back to pray together again.**

“Don’t give up on Lent” by Fr Pat ODonoghue (*inspired by a taste of Chocolat!*)

I write as a struggling ‘chocoholic’ looking forward to the starting gun that is Ash Wednesday while allowing myself the final liberties of the condemned man. My recent fall into the allure of chocolate was sparked off by the film ‘Chocolat’. I was using it to illustrate the meaning of Lent based on an article by Canadian priest, Keith Kennific, entitled: “Chocolat” in Lent: A Discussion (Worship 2001, Spring). He extracts three important Lenten themes from the film: Community, Fasting and Conversion.

Community

The film starring Juliette Binoche, Judy Dench and Johnny Depp tells the story of a mother and her daughter who come to a French village in Lent 1959 to set up a chocolaterie (a kind of a chocolate parlour). She is not welcomed by the local community especially the repressed Mayor, Compte de Reynaud, who exercises an unhealthy control over the people and whose had assumed the role of keeper of the town morals. He also edits the homily scripts of the young priest, played by our own Hugh O’Connor. To cut a long story short this woman and her chocolate change people’s lives and attitudes. It is a study in conversion and how people can change when they are challenged to do so or allowed the freedom to be different. It demonstrates how a community can inhibit or enhance change. Eventually the hardened Compte melts like one of the delicious chocolates, the young curate begins to speak for himself and Easter Sunday is truly a day of celebration. It is easy to laugh at the Compte for his narrow mindedness but Kennific reminds us that to do so is to miss an essential Lenten challenge: “He is a mirror in which we have the opportunity to catch a healing glimpse of our own inconsistency and obtuseness.”

• Closing Prayer

Lord of light, come shine your truth upon my life in this season of Lent.

Light into the dark corners of disillusionment, where I hide beneath the comforts of food and drink.

Light upon the fears and worries I seek to quell with control and routine.

Light within the shadowed areas of hurt that cast shades of resentment and unforgiveness in me.

Light bright across my thoughts, seep into my heart and come awaken my hope.

May your eternal light reveal heavens beautiful promises and bring a peace that surpasses understanding.

Amen.