
WORD MADE FLESH

In the Wilderness, the Holy*

First Sunday of Lent

Deuteronomy. 26: 4-10, Psalm 90, Romans 10: 8-13, Luke 4: 1-13

Lent. The time of the wilderness, the time of recognition.

Recognition that we, as Moses and the Chosen, are sons and daughters of a "wandering Aramaean, who went down into Egypt to find refuge." And it is in a foreign land, a place of refuge, a land of the dead, that one becomes "a nation, great, mighty, and strong." So it was with Moses. So with the Chosen. So with us.

This is the enslavement, the captivity: refuge, might, strength, a great nation. All refuge. This is the misery, "our oppression." And it is precisely this that is offered to Jesus Christ when, filled with the Holy Spirit, he "left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit through the wilderness, being tempted there by the devil for forty days."

Forty days in the wilderness, forty years in the wilderness, forty days of lenten wandering, discipline, discipleship.

The problem, as Deuteronomy and the holy Gospel offer, is not the wilderness, the wandering. Consider the temptations put to Jesus Christ and those endured by the Chosen in Egypt. Refuge, might, strength, and finally, a great nation.

All of these temptations --one might even call them virtuous-- , if taken, place one out of the wilderness, out of the promised land, out of the "shelter of the Most High," out of the stance of praise to the "king of eternal glory."

Curious how one is simultaneously out of the wilderness and out of the Promised Land, out of the presence of the kingdom and no longer looking to the fullness of the kingdom. We are offered the "kingdoms of the world" day in, day out. Dwell in them and the wilderness disappears. Dwell in them and the presence of the kingdom disappears. Dwell in them and be free of the longing, the anticipation, of the Promised Land.

The kingdoms of this world are lands without promise, lands of hopelessness. The kingdom of this world is that place of being wherein the response of the heart no longer anticipates that which is life giving.

The temptations are always and everywhere the same: the kingdoms of might and strength, the nation with its own reason for being, the place of refuge freeing us from the haunting of the wilderness. The security of bread and power, the confidence that the evil one offers, that even if we were to cast ourselves down from the parapet of the Temple, the angels will hold us up on their hands as if life was putting the Creator to the test.

Rather, we pray in the season of our wilderness, "Be with me, Lord, in my distress."

In the wilderness the presence. In the wilderness the presence of the Holy.

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