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## WORD MADE FLESH

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First Sunday in Lent  
Deuteronomy 26:4-10; Romans 10:8-13; Luke 4:1-13

### **The Wilderness Season\***

Wilderness texts. Texts calling us to awaken to the gifts of the desert, the gifts of Great Lent, of this forty-day wandering. We, like Jesus in the Gospel, are invited to be "full of the Holy Spirit" and "led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days" we also are to become conscious of our temptations. The disciplines of Great Lent heighten our regard for the temptations that our normal walk in the civil world so easily clouds.

This is Lent, the springtime of life, when the gifts of the evil-one that deal death and, perhaps - if the disciplines work in us - the gifts that are life-giving become clearer to us. It is a wilderness time, free of the many distraction of ordinary life. Here the temptations we normally ignore fall into frightening relief. That is why the church, since its beginning, has understood this time of the liturgical year to be the desert season. It speaks of the necessary sojourn leading to Calvary, through Crucifixion, to the fullness of life.

Moses, in our first reading, calls on the people to pray out of the heart of the desert experience. Pray, he says, "A wandering Aramean was my ancestor, he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien...."

In the Gospel reading we glimpse the great temptations and see them as completely ordinary. They come as common aspirations - and, often for virtuous reasons - and, when acted out, plunge us into death.

The first gift offered by the cunning one, is to satisfy the most ordinary physical well-being. It is a temptation about the meaning of necessity. Jesus, out of the heart of his fast, points to that which is more foundational than bread: the meaning to our experience which proceeds always and only from the creator and sustainer of life. To have the meaning of our life captured and determined by the quest for the sustenance of life is the first temptation.

The second temptation is a touch subtle but rampant in our world. It is to seek authority and power bereft of the purposes of our life together in the world. The worship of power is the theology of our age, witnessed to daily in the mass media.

Finally, the cunning one reaches into the very heart of the human condition and offers the third temptation. The devil invites Jesus - invites you and me - to see in our actions the action of the Holy. This is the most difficult of temptation to discern. It speaks to the core of the human spirit and our desire for union with the Divine. The spirituality of much of this new age offers this temptation as the goal of the human quest.

Moses, in the prayer he teaches us today, points beyond the desert and invites us to pray: "The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm...and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. So now I bring the first fruit of the ground that you, O Lord, have given me." Come Pascha, the Feast of Resurrection, may we have first fruits, born of our desert journey, to offer in wonder

and thanksgiving.

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