

PEDRO ARRUIPE INSTITUTE, RAIA - GOA

REFLECTIONS ON THE SUNDAY LITURGY

21st February 2021 – First Sunday in Lent

GN 9: 8-15 | 1 PT 3: 18-22 | MK 1: 12-15

Scriptural Track: Fr. Anderson Fernandes SJ

FORTY DAYS: A JOURNEY THROUGH THE DESERT

The first Sunday of Lent in all the three liturgical cycles has the Gospel passage about the Temptation of Jesus. In fact this Sunday's Gospel taken from the Gospel of Mark has the least details of Jesus' time spent in the desert. Mark only tells us that Jesus was led into the desert by the Spirit and that for forty days he was tempted by Satan. The Gospels of Matthew and Luke explain that Jesus fasted while in the desert, that Satan presented him with three temptations, and that Jesus refused each one, quoting Scripture.

The fact that Jesus spent forty days in the desert is significant. The first instance we come across this number in the Bible is the forty days and night of rain during the time of Noah. God makes a covenant with Noah after the calm. Moses spent forty days in prayer atop Mount Sinai before he received the Ten Commandments. We are also reminded of the forty years that the Israelites wandered in the desert after being led from slavery in Egypt. The prophet Elijah also journeyed in the desert for forty days and nights, making his way to Horeb, the mountain of God, where he was also attended to by an angel of the Lord. Remembering the significance of these events of great significance, the Church also set aside forty days for the season of Lent for us to journey – a journey where we remember and remind ourselves of our core values and our core responsibilities as Christians.

A journey is a significant part of our lives because during it we are moving – hopefully in the right direction. Some might move at a faster pace while others might make moves with baby steps but the key point we keep in mind here is that we must continue to move. As we move in the journey of life, we realize that there are moments when we do extremely well and at other times we question the whole exercise and are left frustrated. When doubts or insecurities creep in, the journey we journeyed so long seems futile and existential questions arise.

In Mark's Gospel, the desert marks the beginning of Jesus' battle with Satan; the ultimate test and the climax will be experienced in Jesus' final hours on the cross. In a similar way, our Lenten observances are only a beginning, a preparation for and a reinforcement of our ongoing struggle to resist the temptations we face in the journey of our daily living. During Lent, we are led by the Holy Spirit to remember the vows of Baptism in which we promised to reject sin and to follow Jesus. Just as Jesus was ministered to by the angels, (found in the Gospel of Matthew too) God also supports us in our struggle against sin and temptation. We succeed because Jesus conquered sin once and for all in his saving death on the cross.

Jesus reminds each of us this week that by being in touch with our Abba Father – through prayer and fasting – that our journey becomes an enriched experience knowing that we have a constant companion assisting and caring for us on this journey. Amen.