

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT (2/28-3/1/2009)

Genesis 9/8-15, Psalm 25, 1 Peter 3/18-22, Mark 1/12-15

If you are looking for an example of the diversity in writing style and content that distinguishes *Mark* from the other evangelists, this Gospel passage is as good as any.

Both *Matthew* and *Luke* spell out in great detail the scene of the temptations in the wilderness: the forty day fast, the presence of Satan, the three temptations, Jesus' response each time from the *Book of Deuteronomy*.

Mark mentions the bare facts, comments briefly, and then gets on with Jesus' agenda.

Did he not consider the individual temptations of Jesus in the wilderness of much importance?

Mark was presumably the first account of the Good News put down in black and white.

His version is shorter, by far, than the other Gospels.

Were you conversant with Greek (the language in which the Gospels were written originally), you would recognize that his language is not sophisticated, but more street-wise.

All of which brings us no closer to understanding *Mark's* reason for not spelling out the various temptations as do *Matthew* and *Luke*.

Though less specific, what *Mark* does say is significant: "*The Spirit sent Jesus out towards the desert.*" "Sent out" may be too mild a translation; the original meaning was more like "shoved him out" or "pushed him out".

It almost implies that Jesus was reluctant, a thought that does not sit well with us.

But, as we continually say, Jesus was a man like us in all things but sin.

He had been told he was the Son of God, and he had to digest that notion, to integrate it into the next months and years of his life.

What does it mean to be the Son of God? Not exactly an easy question to answer.

Each of you readers has been told in Baptism that you too are a son or daughter of God.

What does that mean to you?

Have you ever taken time (not necessarily in a wilderness) to figure it out?

How special does that title make you?

What does it demand of you?

Perhaps those were the issues Jesus was dealing with in his sojourn in the wilderness.

As the liturgical year proceeds, we will witness the fruit of his time apart as he sets out to do the work of the Son of God.

We will watch the way he treats others; we will monitor his openness to the poor and marginalized: we will listen to his wisdom, to his parables, to his encouraging words.

We will see just how human he is - and just how divine he is.

The focus of our spiritual and liturgical lives is this Jesus.

Each weekend when we come to celebrate the Liturgy with the community, Jesus Christ will be at the center of our attention.

Watch him closely; see if he "walks the talk" of the Son of God.

If he does, then that time in the wilderness was a most important event in his life - and ours