

LENT 1 (ABC)

In the Gospel today we see where the Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. He needed to be driven because the desert is not the most appealing of places to be. It was considered to be the abode of demons and wild animals. But paradoxically 'tis also the place where we can find God. The Desert Fathers and mothers, the founders of monasticism, can testify to that.

Figuratively speaking, Lent is about joining Jesus in the desert but, like Jesus we too may need to be driven there by the Spirit because of our natural aversion to solitude in today's noise-ridden world. Many people are afraid of silence and being alone with God where they may be forced to confront their demons and grapple with their temptations. The Devil knows our Achilles heel – that is why he tempted Jesus when, after prolonged fasting, he was at his weakest.

One of the temptations was that Jesus could have all the kingdoms of the world if he'd but drop to his knees and worship the Father of Lies. But Jesus's Kingdom was not of this world and He said as much to Pilate during his Passion. The preface for the Mass for Lent put it poignantly, *"having being freed from disordered affections, we may so deal with the things of this passing world as to hold rather to the things which eternally endure"*.

We could easily fall for the above temptation if our lives are too wrapped up in material things. Remember those August riots of 2011 in London. They were frightening. People were prepared to go to any lengths to break into shops and steal the goods they hankered after. But, deep down, are any of us immune from these disordered desires in today's consumerist society. "Most of the environmental issues we see today can be linked to consumption"

There is a story told about a man who died and was overjoyed to be consigned to a place where all his needs would be instantly satisfied. All he had to do was click his fingers and there before him would be the object of his desire, whether it was food fit for a King, or the flashiest cars, or the house of his dreams or the cruise of a lifetime or the most desirable girlfriend. You name it, he got it. But after a whole year or so of this he became totally bored and dissatisfied and complained to God that this was worse than Hell. And God said: "where do you think you are"?

Deep down we all know that real happiness and fulfilment is in giving rather than receiving, sharing rather than accumulating, forging genuine communion with people rather than being self-absorbed. Heaven is an external exchange of love between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, his holy angels and saints. Hell is the opposite where you are alone with no one to love and no one to love you. Lent is a time for checking our compass to see if we've still headed in the right direction.

So, figuratively speaking, as we join our Saviour in the Desert, He will help us see through false pursuits of happiness presented to us by the world, the flesh or the Devil and help concentrate our minds instead on that which leads to true joy and lasting happiness.