

First Sunday of Lent (B). Gospel of Mark 1, 12-15.

As usual, the evangelist Mark is stingy with details and remains very reserved about the details of an event. It is the case today to evoke the temptation of Jesus in the desert, a major episode in the life of Christ on the threshold of his public ministry. No one witnessed this decisive experience, yet Jesus may have told it to some close friends.

So, what is the meaning of this desert? What lessons can we learn from it for us at the beginning of this Lenten season?

First of all, let us return to the original meaning of the word '*desert*' in Hebrew and Greek. The word literally means a place without words, without human words. The image that comes spontaneously to mind is that of the Sahara desert made of sand or the wilderness and mass of stones in the Gobi desert. In these places there is no voice related to human activities. There is no emptiness, let's say, but a profound silence that makes it possible to listen again and above all allow God to communicate Himself and let his Word resonate in the depths of human heart.

Brothers and sisters, we all know that next to these very natural, physical deserts, our lives are filled with other deserts: such as our poor social relations and our solitudes. How can we then face this solitude which is not good in itself and which, according to the book of Genesis, man has not to search for because "*it is not good for man to be alone*"? This unavoidable solitude that man experiences at certain moments of his life finally reveals itself as being a chance, and in fact a grace as a test of truth, a time of inner growth and motivation in his life. Alone with himself, alone with God, man becomes capable to return, to reflect, to convert due to this experience of review of life and examination of conscience. In order to stimulate us in this process both rigid and vital, it becomes important to know that Christ experienced something similar. After his baptism, he was driven into the desert by the Holy Spirit. Alone with himself, alone with the Father, he discovered in depth, through the trial of temptation, who he really is and what the content of his mission will be. Two signs attest this. First, he lived among the wild beasts like the first humans in a rough nature not yet marked by evil and violence. Second, in that world where there are also spiritual beings, angels serve him.

This allusion in the gospel according to Mark means that Christ has authority and sovereignty over the entire created world. And now recognized in his divinity, Christ can proclaim aloud the call to conversion and faith. The Reign of God is close at hand, it is already coming true in his very Person.

Brothers and sisters, the presence of the Reign of God is poured out and communicated in our humanity. The Kingdom is already present as we are on the way to it with God's company to become holy as He is holy.

And now, what to do?

Last Ash Wednesday, the essential means were taught to us: almsgiving, prayer and fasting. Moreover, let's not forget that the purpose of Lent is to change our mindset and our mentality in order to become more firmly attached to Christ. So may the Spirit "*change our hearts from hearts of stone to hearts of flesh*" and let's strive to imitate Christ as closely as we can. It is up to us to discern the proper desert, the appropriate place where God invites himself to speak to our hearts. But surely, we must want it and take the time and the courage to do it.

May the grace of the Lord help us to live courageously this time of desert and loneliness on the way to a complete renewal of our lives at Easter. Amen