

Rectoría de San Juan de Dios
I Sunday of Lent-Cycle B
Gn 9, 8-15; Ps 24; 1 Pt 3, 18-22; Mk 1, 12-15
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Let Us Find Our Interior Strength

Jesus is driven into the desert by the Spirit. He enters, but in tension from His own inner strength, His strength for living and loving. It is a unique moment in that Jesus cannot postpone being tempted and tested. The imperative need to verify what He is made of springs from His interior life; He needs to examine Himself in the isolation of the desert with a demand of His own, as He faces His mission.

The desert that Mark speaks about has diverse significance: isolation, withdrawal, and solitude; in this sense, it is the place of the weakness of man, where temptation could seem stronger, but also it is the place of encounter with God.

We want to understand desert in both senses. And we resolve to enter the desert as Jesus did, looking for our inner strength. We want to allow ourselves to be in tension through the inner dynamic of our ability to live and love; from there comes strength. Especially now, we want to know how strong we are. Are we strong enough to resist the test in this desert of Lent and in the deserts of our life?

I remember Cardinal Van Thuan,¹ whose testimony I

¹ François Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan. Accused of plotting with the Vatican and the imperialists of his country [Viet Nam] to organize a coup against the Communist regime, he was arrested in Saigon on the 15th of August 1975 and liberated the 21st of November 1988. (I met him in the Mexican College in Rome in 1988.)

heard in person, when he said that the interior strength that helped him to endure months of darkness in prison, when he waited by a hole for a cockroach to eat, was the Word of God, the dynamism of that Word that then accompanied him in his solitude.

It is important to meditate now on this idea of our inner strength, when the forces we see in the world are external forces that are degenerate or contrary forces that easily fall apart. We, the people of faith, want to discover this Sunday that the power of our inner strength is capable of maintaining the whole horizon of life, that it is even capable of bringing down any system of domination and injustice.

But we need to awaken our inner strength. Let us think about these three ideas:

1-Let us know about Covenants.

To know that I can do nothing alone. The Covenant of God with Noah is an image of many covenants that God always makes with us; when God establishes His Covenant with Noah, He promises that He will never again exterminate life on earth. This involves us in a new awareness of life with the rest of creation. To know about covenants means to experience God's Covenant with us.

Can you single out times in your life in which God has made a covenant with you? In the case of Noah, the sign of the Covenant was a rainbow. In our case, what signs do we keep of the covenants that God has made with us? Have you made covenants with another person? That is, have you freely committed to do good to him? It is important to know about covenants because there, in the gratitude and generosity of the covenant, we know how far our inner strength extends. Covenants are forceful and have great

power because they are not sustained by external forces but from the fruit of our spiritual life, from our tension for living and loving that never rests until it materializes in actions that transform lives.

2- Let us live life as saved persons.

Just as with Noah and Christ, we cannot allow ourselves to be corrupted.

At times we lose sight of the fact that we have an immense inner strength. Saved by Christ, we can do everything, as Peter proposes in the second reading. Through the merits of Christ, we enjoy a new life.

To live life as saved persons means the commitment to follow Jesus in his hostilities to the unjust world, but with the security of victory and hope at the end of the road—the Resurrection.

3-Let us enter into our own desert.

Each of us knows how he is at this moment, at the entrance of his Lenten desert. We must allow ourselves to be led by the Spirit of God, touching our inner tension. It is important to test ourselves and to resist the temptation to abandon the plan of Jesus, the plan of our life.

To enter into the desert means maintaining temperance. Trying to live sincerely these forty days, without the usual comforts, allows us to be tested through the forces of isolation and abandonment, but drinking from our strength of life and love.

To enter into the desert also means to declare, as Christ did, that “this is the time of fulfillment” for us; it is possible that this is our year, the historical moment of our making a qualitative leap in the development of our interior

life and in our relationship with God and with others. If we declare that this is the time of fulfillment, it is because we are prepared to walk the way of conversion and are prepared to change those vices or errors that do not allow us to grow in the transcendence of our entire life.