

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Feb 14th 2016

As I prayed my way through today's readings, I was struck at the very beginning of the Gospel passage. Jesus was not alone in the desert. He was filled with the Holy Spirit! How cool is that?

Jesus was not alone, nor are we alone on our journeys. Next, I read that Jesus didn't eat for 40 days, he was hungry. He was empty. In fact, are we not also invited to empty ourselves, decrease our ego, become hungry, so we can more fully be filled with the Holy Spirit? If we can let go of our ego selves and let the Spirit fill us, then, when we are tempted we are better able to respond from a place of the divine, represented in the Gospel by Jesus responding with scripture. I believe this is the basic call of the Lenten Season invitation to prayer, fasting and almsgiving. It is an invitation to let go of ourselves, our egos, just a little bit more to make room for God. It is an invitation to remember and reconnect with who and whose we really are at our core as children of God.

Although not the only way to empty ourselves, a good way is enter into the silence of retreat. Many focus on the symbol of dryness in the desert but I like to think of Jesus' desert experience more as a retreat before he started his ministry. A time when Jesus entered into the silence simplicity of the desert to connect with His Father and the Spirit. I have found on my own journey and as I journey with others that entering the silence of retreat allows us too to let go of the roles, jobs and "shoulds" to make room for God to reveal Godself to us. This is a great gift, a great grace of silence, one could say, the silence of the desert. Our lives are so full of busy-ness and noise that we don't have time to be with God. We can't hear God calling, we can't see God coming. We don't know God within us. We need the silence of the desert, the silence of retreat to hear God remind us "you are my beloved, in whom I am well pleased." We need the silence and solitude of the desert to remember that it is God who strengthens us. We need the quiet of retreat to prepare us for the noise of our lives and respond to temptations from the divine within.

How is the Spirit leading us into the desert these forty days of Lent? Maybe there is an invitation to retreat, maybe a few extra moments of silent prayer. How are we being called to decrease so God can increase? How are we called to respond from the divine within?

Lastly, as I was writing this reflection I found myself singing "These Alone are Enough" by Dan Schutte based on the Suscipe by St. Ignatius. I include the Suscipe here as another invitation.

Suscipe

St. Ignatius of Loyola

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty,
my memory, my understanding,
and my entire will,
All I have and call my own.
You have given all to me.
To you, Lord, I return it.
Everything is yours; do with it what you will.
Give me only your love and your grace,
that is enough for me.

Amy Hoover-Creighton University's Retreat Center