

*February 17, 2010: Ash Wednesday*

*Joel 2:12-18; Psalm 51; 2 Corinthians 5:20--6:2; Matthew 6:1-6,16-18*

How is your spiritual life? Who are you, deep down in your heart of hearts? What gives you deep joy? What refreshes you? What helps you through the frenzy of modern life? If your answers to any of these questions tend to involve drugs (even chocolate or caffeine!), shopping, loud music, mindless comedies or horror flicks, or any object outside of yourself, then Lent is probably the time for you! Paul's letter to the Corinthians today is written to you: "Brothers and sisters: We are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God...We appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For he says: In an acceptable time I heard you, and on the day of salvation I helped you. Behold, now is a very acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation." Now is the time to build up that spiritual side of you, to find the beauty and strength within you so that you can be strong in time of trial and at peace in time of disorder. Prayer, fasting and almsgiving are the methods to do this; finding a good spiritual "trainer" is a good way to keep on the journey.

*Are Paul's words written to you? Who could you ask to be your guide on a spiritual journey?*

*February 21, 2010: First Sunday of Lent*

*Deuteronomy 26:4-10; Psalm 91; Romans 10:8-13; Luke 4:1-13*

Well, of course Jesus was hungry after forty days without food. So of course, the devil's first temptation is with food. But is it food, really, to turn stones into bread? Or is the temptation to use his power to meet his own needs rather than follow the plan of the Father? Jesus is wise to this approach and doesn't fall. So if Jesus' goal is more cosmic than just filling his belly, the devil has another idea: power and glory! And all Jesus has to do is worship the devil -- instead of God. Once again, Jesus is wise to his tricks and doesn't fall. Okay, then, so how about something flashy that will get the attention of the people so they will listen to Jesus? But Jesus is wise to this too: the mission isn't about Jesus, it's about the Kingdom of God, and Jesus won't be turned aside. So the devil quits -- for a time. Temptations come in many forms, and most of them are attractive. That's what makes them difficult to withstand.

*What tempts you away from the path God has called you to? What helps you to reject the devil's empty promises?*

*February 28, 2010: Second Sunday of Lent*

*Genesis 15:5-12,17-18; Psalm 27; Philippians 3:17--4:1; Luke 9:28b-36*

In all of the times that I have heard this reading, I never once before registered the word “exodus” as the subject of the conversation between Jesus, Moses and Elijah. Just as every year I hear something new in the Epiphany readings, I hear something new every time I hear any of scripture proclaimed, even if I just hear it from the new perspective of my life one year later than the last time I heard it. The Exodus was the defining moment for God’s people in the Hebrew Scriptures; it was what formed them into “a people” from a disorganized and motley group of slaves in Egypt. The song “Change Our Hearts” has the line in it, “We are the people your call set apart.” God’s chosen people were set apart by the Exodus, their call to escape from slavery in Egypt. We are set apart, too, by a call: a call to escape from slavery to sin and to move into the freedom of the children of God. Jesus, our leader in this Exodus, bears our sins in a mystical way and offers forgiveness so that we might start anew.

*How does Jesus’ sacrifice free you to escape from sin and live as a child of God?*