



St. Thomas Church: established July 1, 1285 by King Vaclav II

St. Thomas Church

Reflection on the Gospel

Deserts can be fearful places. An inhospitable climate, a variety of local serpents, spiders, lizards, flies, or disease bearing mosquitoes and loneliness, all pose threats to survival. Yet, deserted areas can be as fascinating today as they were to ancient peoples who thought them to be the habitat both of good and malevolent, animal guised spirits. "Only beasts and gods can live alone in deserts," ran an old adage. Writing around AD 70 Mark, to convey his theological concerns would, of course, use language and imagery drawn from popular legend and oral history. We read that Jesus, according to Mark's phrase "was driven by the Spirit" into the desert. This meant that his mission was totally inaugurated not through personal or human whim but by the direct –almost descriptively coercive-action of the Holy Spirit. Once in the desert, here a synonym for the domain of Satan (in Hebrew this means "adversary"), Jesus experienced first hand the full force of diabolical temptation. Was it hunger, the desire for power or even a reckless presumption of God's protection? Matthew's gospel seems to indicate all three factors were in active collusion. Yet, as God willed, Jesus was to be abandoned neither now nor in future confrontations with those relentless adversaries of his public ministry to Israel. "For the angels came to minister to him" was Mark's assurance that Jesus, "the Holy One of God", had passed through his first "trial or temptation" with divine assistance. He was ready to begin.

All of us are now standing on the edge of our own "lenten deserts." It is almost a daunting journey to arrive at Easter glory. The temptations to "to let things be" is very attractive. Why do penance? Is not life penitential in its peculiar demands and disappointments? Why be spiritually "masochistic"? That is not the point. What Mark tells us in this gospel passage or pericope is that we have to shed the encumbrances that weigh us down on our journey. Traditionally, the Church has proposed three practices for the lenten season.

The first, **prayer**, or conversation with God, makes us sensitive to the presence of God and His will for us.

The reading of Sacred Scripture can be of enormous help as we take these first steps of enlightenment. The second, **almsgiving**, is really giving thanks for the abundance God has given us. Scripture says that a generous person will be heard on the day of distress. The third practice is **fasting**. To forgo some foods and drink is recommended by all the great teachers in the Church. So, with the example of Jesus, himself, and the teaching of our brothers and sisters who have gone before us, let us walk through our "desert of forty days" with courage. "If God is with us, what can anyone do to harm us?"

Today's Prayer

I pause for a moment
and think of the love and
the grace that God
showers on me: I am
created in the image and
likeness of God; I am
God's dwelling-place.



February 13th and 14st 2016

The First Sunday of Lent
Year C

Josefská 8, Malá Strana, Prague 1, 118 01

Tel: 257 530 556, 602 643 365

Lent is the season before Easter, in the West lasting liturgically from Ash Wednesday until the Mass of Holy Thursday exclusive (see General Norms for the Liturgical Year and Calendar). The evening of Holy Thursday begins the *The Easter Triduum*, which lasts from Holy Thursday to the Evening Prayer of Easter Day. However, Lenten fasting and penance continue until the end of Holy Week, and all of Holy Week is included in the traditional 40 day Lenten fast, despite Lent ending *liturgically* on Holy Thursday. We should note that in many Protestant churches, the liturgical season of Lent continues through Holy Saturday, although in current Catholic discipline, Lent ends liturgically before Holy Thursday. While Sundays are typically excluded from the Lenten fasting and abstinence restrictions, and are not numbered in the traditional "40 Days" of Lent, they are still part of the Lenten season, as can be seen from their Lenten themes. Thus, the way Lent is observed in the Catholic Church can be a bit tricky, because the actual modern liturgical season of Lent (lasting 44 days, including Sundays) is numbered slightly differently than the traditional 40 day Lenten fast , which excludes Sundays.

The purpose of Lent is to be a season of fasting, self-denial, Christian growth, penitence, conversion, and simplicity. Lent, which comes from the Teutonic (Germanic) word for springtime, can be viewed as a spiritual spring cleaning: a time for taking spiritual inventory and then cleaning out those things which hinder our corporate and personal relationships with Jesus Christ and our service to him. Thus it is fitting that the season of Lent begin with a symbol of repentance: placing ashes mixed with oil on one's head or forehead. However, we must remember that our Lenten disciplines are supposed to ultimately transform our entire person: body, soul, and spirit. Our Lenten disciplines are supposed to help us become more like Christ. Eastern Christians call this process *theosis*, which St. Athanasius aptly describes as "becoming by grace what God is by nature."

Announcements and Ongoing Activities

*If you would like to receive a copy of the bulletin by email, please contact osaprag@augustiniani.cz

* Every Saturday at 9:00am **feeding of the homeless**, as a social service

* **Bible Study** takes place every Tuesday from 18:30-19:30 in Tagaste room.

*Wednesday at 18:30. Tagaste room takes place **Adult Religious education**.

***Fr. William** will be in USA for the next month. Fr. Juan will be taking care of the community: 602684538

*During **Lent season** every Friday at 6pm in the church will be the Stations of the Cross.

Year of Mercy "Merciful like the Father"

Let us rediscover these corporal works of mercy:

- 1.to feed the hungry,
2. give drink to the thirsty,
3. clothe the naked,
4. welcome the stranger,
5. heal the sick,
- 6.visit the imprisoned,
7. bury the dead.

And let us not forget the spiritual works of mercy:

1. to counsel the doubtful,
2. instruct the ignorant,
- 3.admonish sinners,
- 4.comfort the afflicted,
5. forgive offences,
- 6.bear patiently those who do us ill,
7. pray for the living and the dead."

Pope Francis's message for Lent 2016

"I desire mercy, and not sacrifice" (Mt 9:13)

3. The works of mercy

God's mercy transforms human hearts; it enables us, through the experience of a faithful love, to become merciful in turn. In an ever new miracle, divine mercy shines forth in our lives, inspiring each of us to love our neighbour and to devote ourselves to what the Church's tradition calls the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. These works remind us that faith finds expression in concrete everyday actions meant to help our neighbours in body and spirit: by feeding, visiting, comforting and instructing them. On such things will we be judged. For this reason, I expressed my hope that "the Christian people may reflect on the corporal and spiritual works of mercy; this will be a way to reawaken our conscience, too often grown dull in the face of poverty, and to enter more deeply into the heart of the Gospel where the poor have a special experience of God's mercy" (*ibid.*, 15). For in the poor, the flesh of Christ "becomes visible in the flesh of the tortured, the crushed, the scourged, the malnourished, and the exiled... to be acknowledged, touched, and cared for by us" (*ibid.*). It is the unprecedented and scandalous mystery of the extension in time of the suffering of the Innocent Lamb, the burning bush of gratuitous love.

Before this love, we can, like Moses, take off our sandals (cf. Ex 3:5), especially when the poor are our brothers or sisters in Christ who are suffering for their faith.

In the light of this love, which is strong as death (cf. Song 8:6), the real poor are revealed as those who refuse to see themselves as such. They consider themselves rich, but they are actually the poorest of the poor. This is because they are slaves to sin, which leads them to use wealth and power not for the service of God and others, but to stifle within their hearts the profound sense that they too are only poor beggars. The greater their power and wealth, the more this blindness and deception can grow. It can even reach the point of being blind to Lazarus begging at their doorstep (cf. Lk 16:20-21). Lazarus, the poor man, is a figure of Christ, who through the poor pleads for our conversion. As such, he represents the possibility of conversion which God offers us and which we may well fail to see. Such blindness is often accompanied by the proud illusion of our own omnipotence, which reflects in a sinister way the diabolical "you will be like God" (Gen 3:5) which is the root of all sin. This illusion can likewise take social and political forms, as shown by the totalitarian systems of the twentieth century, and, in our own day, by the ideologies of monopolizing thought and technoscience, which would make God irrelevant and reduce man to raw material to be exploited. This illusion can also be seen in the sinful structures linked to a model of false development based on the idolatry of money, which leads to lack of concern for the fate of the poor on the part of wealthier individuals and societies; they close their doors, refusing even to see the poor.

For all of us, then, the season of Lent in this Jubilee Year is a favourable time to overcome our existential alienation by listening to God's word and by practising the works of mercy. In the corporal works of mercy we touch the flesh of Christ in our brothers and sisters who need to be fed, clothed, sheltered, visited; in the spiritual works of mercy – counsel, instruction, forgiveness, admonishment and prayer – we touch more directly our own sinfulness. The corporal and spiritual works of mercy must never be separated. By touching the flesh of the crucified Jesus in the suffering, sinners can receive the gift of realizing that they too are poor and in need. By taking this path, the "proud", the "powerful" and the "wealthy" spoken of in the *Magnificat* can also be embraced and undeservedly loved by the crucified Lord who died and rose for them. This love alone is the answer to that yearning for infinite happiness and love that we think we can satisfy with the idols of knowledge, power and riches. Yet the danger always remains that by a constant refusal to open the doors of their hearts to Christ who knocks on them in the poor, the proud, rich and powerful will end up condemning themselves and plunging into the eternal abyss of solitude which is Hell. The pointed words of Abraham apply to them and to all of us: "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them" (Lk 16:29). Such attentive listening will best prepare us to celebrate the final victory over sin and death of the Bridegroom, now risen, who desires to purify his Betrothed in expectation of his coming.

Let us not waste this season of Lent, so favourable a time for conversion! We ask this through the maternal intercession of the Virgin Mary, who, encountering the greatness of God's mercy freely bestowed upon her, was the first to acknowledge her lowliness (cf. Lk 1:48) and to call herself the Lord's humble servant (cf. Lk 1:38).